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THE PIASTS *of* POLAND

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by ANTONI GRONOWICZ

Charles Scribner's Sons
New York 1945



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ANTONI GRONOWICZ

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Translated from the Polish by
JOSEPH VETTER

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Introducing
THE PIASTS



*HERE WE MEET Stephan Piast
and his family, who symbolize the
peasants of Poland, and who bear the
name of the first dynasty of Polish
kings. It is through their eyes that we
will have a brief introduction to the
history of Poland.*



CHAPTER 1

In the Village by the Black Road

IT WAS NEARING the end of August 1939. In the village of Adamowka it seemed that each day was shorter than the day before—and rainier. The disagreeable wind blew constantly, and instead of scattering the leaden threatening clouds seemed to sweep them closer to the ground and almost into the straw-covered huts of the village. This year the rye, wheat, barley, and even the late oats, called American oats, had already been gathered from the fields. The grain had been piled in the barns and when these were filled, stacked skillfully into shapes which from a distance looked like small huts. Everywhere the harvest stood waiting for the thresher. The poorer peasants would have to start this work almost immediately, but the wealthier ones, blessed with plenty, were in no hurry and would put off the threshing until late winter, saying, "The seeds of grain come out easier with a good frost."

That was the way of the wealthier peasants not only in the village of Adamowka but in all the other villages in the whole of Poland, for the country is about seventy per cent agrarian. And when we consider the rainy weather we may say that the same dreary atmosphere that prevailed in Adamowka covered the whole small country. Poland, after regaining her independence in 1918, was a country of 150,470 square miles. So whenever a strong wind blew down from the Baltic Sea, across the plains of Poland it carried the rain all the way

to the Carpathian Mountains in the south of the country.

Although Poland was a little more than half the size of Texas, she occupied sixth place in Europe so far as territory is concerned, and her nearly thirty-six million people held the same position in regard to population. Among all the nations of the world Poland stood eleventh in population, while in respect to area she was twenty-sixth. In the fifteenth century she was the largest country in Europe.

But the greatness of a nation and the happiness of its individual citizens does not depend on the amount of square miles it embraces or how many millions of people make their homes within its borders. Liberty, equality, and work are the foundation of an individual's happiness in any country, and on this same basis the greatness of a nation should be measured. And in the last few years just before the autumn of 1939 Poland did not have a penny's worth of equality, and liberty was as hard to find as water in the Sahara Desert. Oh, yes, there was plenty of work for the peasants and the workers, but they could not live on the money they received for their labor.

Thus it was with the peasants of the village of Adamowka in that rainy late August of 1939. They worked from sunup to sundown for barely enough to keep body and soul together. The fields in which they toiled lay along a wide, newly built highway. The road ran from the central part of the country through the small cities of Włodzimierz and Luck to the ancient city of Ostrog, which lay on the frontier of the Soviet Union. It had been rebuilt by the Polish Government after Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany and it was to be one of the main roads on which the German army was to move forward in its attack on the Soviet Ukraine.

The modern stone highway, bordered with hundred-year-old oaks and poplars, has an old and very rich history. The neighboring villagers still tell stories of the march of Napoleon's army in 1812 over this same route during their attack

on Imperial Russia. And they tell of the defeated soldiers returning the same way and dying in the frozen mud from hunger and cold. The Ukrainians were resentful toward Napoleon's soldiers because they had attacked Russia. The Poles, in spite of their hatred for the Czar, despised Napoleon Bonaparte almost as much because he had promised the Polish people if they entered the war on his side he would give them a free state, and he did not keep his word. So when the weary soldiers stopped in the villages by the side of the road, the peasants—Ukrainian and Polish—either set their dogs on them, or murdered them, refusing to give them food or lodging. Some say that is why the highway is called the Black Road.

There are other stories that tell how the road was used in the thirteenth century by the Tartars in their various attempts to penetrate and conquer Europe. In those times, the Tartars were regarded as black devils and plunderers, and so some say the name "black road of devils" was given to this route. In time the word "devil" was dropped, but to this day the name "Black Road" remains.

The village of Adamowka, along this historical highway, once belonged to the enormously wealthy Count Ledochowski. Down through the years the Ledochowski family has given Poland many bishops, politicians, national traitors, and one general of the Jesuit order. After the treaty of Versailles, when freedom was restored to Poland, the liberal government bought by force the huge country estates of the titled landowners and sold them at cost to those who had worked previously for the noblemen. During the first years of the existence of the free nation many thousand estates throughout the countryside were distributed in this way: But with the coming of dictatorial rule after the bloody *coup d'état* staged by Marshal Jozef Pilsudski in May 1926, such agricultural reforms were immediately stopped.

The people of the village of Adamowka were fortunate be-

T HIS wooden home is typical of those built by the peasants, but each section of the country has its own variations in house design and decoration. Many of the dwellings are beautifully decorated both inside and out.



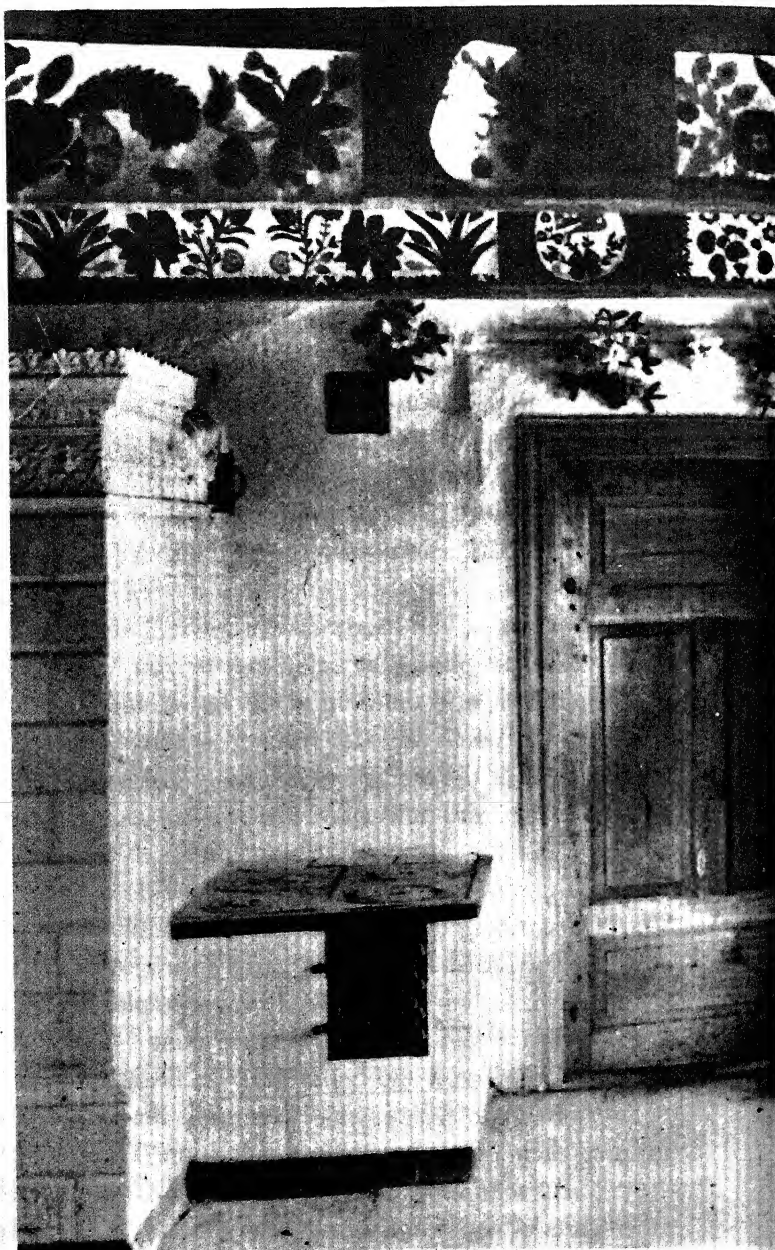
cause they had bought the Count's lands in 1920 before the liberal spirit of the government died. One of the luckiest was Count Ledochowski's ex-stableman, Stefan Piast. He and his wife, Maria, had bought as much land as they could with all the money that they had managed to scrape together through the years—as much land as together they could possibly cultivate with their four hands. For not even their eldest son, Janek, could help them, as he was then not quite six years old. But the soil was fertile, black as coal, and cool and soft to the touch. It had produced bountiful harvests of rye, wheat, barley, and other grains, giving sustenance to all the Piasts—to those who had been and to those who were to come. And so life went on through the years in the course of which Stefan and Maria Piast brought up a good-sized family, tall, straight, and blonde as their forefathers had been. After the first son Janek, a daughter Ewa was born; then another son Piotr came, followed by a daughter Jadwiga, and last of all a son Mietek. There were seven in all to be nourished from the fifteen-acre patch of earth. True it was not very large, but the children began to grow up and to help with the hard work, and the fields were made to yield larger and larger harvests. The Piasts were able to build themselves a new home made out of thick pine boards and covered snugly with stalks of rye. On the abutments of the house they carved various designs which were dominated at the top by two horses' heads. Janek, the oldest son, had worked hard on these two heads, carving them as carefully as he could. He loved animals and enjoyed working in the fields, but he had no ears for anything that had to do with school or study.

Naturally the Piasts' house was not as beautiful as the homes of the neighboring priests or Count Ledochowski's mansion. These houses looked like small brick palaces with graceful balconies and tall white columns. The Piasts' house was an ordinary peasant's home, with a large kitchen about the size of a

barn and two other big rooms. The kitchen was furnished with a huge stove, a few benches placed near the windows, and a closet for the gayly flowered dishes which the lady of the house had bought at a fair in the small city of Włodzimierz. On the wall near the closet hung cups, painted with bright colored flowers. The room was decorated with a great variety of paper cut-outs of birds and flowers. It was the most attractive of all the rooms, as was fitting, for here the family ate and sat around the stove on cold nights and, when guests arrived, this is where they were entertained. The other rooms held benches, chairs, tables and a great bed piled high with pillows. These rooms were decorated with pictures of Christ, the Holy Mother, and the saints—just as were similar rooms all over Poland.

Janek regarded the inside of the house as belonging to the women and the outside as belonging to him. So with a chisel and a hammer, and the help of his father and his friends, he decorated the outer walls in different designs. Then he white-washed parts of the designs so that from a distance they looked very decorative and flowerlike. He lavished a great deal of care and time on the intricate carving, especially on the complicated designs around the windows and the doors. The pleasant task of decorating the inside or the outside of the house could only be performed in the very early spring, the late autumn, or in the winter when there was no work—ploughing, sowing, or taking care of the harvests—to be done in the fields. But slowly, year by year, the house grew in beauty.

The Piasts in Adamowka were not the only ones who adorned their simple homes in this fashion. The villagers from the colorful regions of Śląsk, Pomorze, Mazowsze, Podole, and other parts of the country brightened their homes in the same way. Throughout many generations each worked in his own manner contributing his own designs and so, unconsciously, a regional folklore had been born. Of course this was the term



The interior of a peasant home showing typical designs on plates, cupboard and rafters.

used by the educated people from the cities to describe this primitive culture. The peasants regarded their work as orderly and clean and rarely thought of it as beauty. To them it was merely seemly, a following of tradition which they considered a necessity that had nothing to do with luxury of adornment.

The folklore of Adamowka and other regions of Wolyn had come from central Poland hundreds of years earlier and had intermingled with the native Ukrainian folklore and the two combined had achieved some lively and artistic results. Within the boundary of after-Versailles Poland in the southeastern part of the country lived a few million Ukrainians. From past ages these people had absorbed much Byzantine culture which was very noticeable in the art of their churches and in their religious ceremonies. Practically all the Poles are followers of the Roman Catholic religion, while the Ukrainians in the southeastern parts of the country and the White Russians in the northeast belong to the Greek Orthodox and the Greek Catholic churches.

The Piast family, like almost all the other residents of the village of Adamowka, were Roman Catholics, just as their forefathers had been for a hundred years or more. Their ancestors had first traveled toward the eastern part of the country in search of bread. Stefan Piast believed his immediate forbears had come from Wieliczka, not far from Krakow, where there were large salt mines. Sometimes he said that the reason why he admired the Krakow dress so heartily was because his forefathers had come from the suburbs of Krakow. And when he lit his pipe in deep satisfaction he boasted that his ancestors had been mountaineers. His wife Maria would laugh and answer teasingly, "Ah, you say that because you like to smoke a pipe and talk on endlessly about nothing."

When their daughter Ewa grew older and attended school she loved to read and found a special delight in poetry. One evening a few years earlier she had brought home a book of

patriotic poems written by Maria Konopnicka. When Ewa had finished her supper, she sat down on a bench in the kitchen and began to read a poem aloud:

*"Country of mine—holding the soul of a nation,
Living miraculously in cold and starvation,
It is only this hope, that in our hearts flowers—
Work for ourselves and songs for these children of ours."*

Ewa paused and looked around to see if her mother and father were listening to the poem. Her father puffed contentedly on his pipe and called out, "Go on. Read some more!" Nothing loath, Ewa began on another stanza.

*"Country of mine—great are thy towns and thy cities
Green are thy fields by Piast planted.
Sweet are thy forests, fields, and hollows,
Where songs of hope are sung by the larks and swallows."*

Her father interrupted, asking her to repeat the first two lines of the second verse. Ewa complied willingly, and when she came to the word "Piast," Stefan cried out, "So even the poets write about the Piasts, do they?" He jumped up from his seat and began to walk up and down the kitchen, the smoke from his pipe curling around his head.

"But what's so exciting about that?" Janek, the eldest son, inquired. "The whole history of Poland is based on the Piasts, but that does not necessarily mean our family."

"No, indeed," agreed Ewa seriously. "It is about that old, old family from which, so our teachers tell us, the first dynasty of Polish kings was born."

"And it all happened a thousand years ago!" added Janek.

"Yes, yes—I know all about it," Stefan said a trifle uncertainly as he sat down again quietly on the bench. Actually he knew nothing about it, but he did not want his children to think that, though he was able to read, he was ignorant of the



A Polish peasant girl in holiday costume.



Old Polish mountaineer with his pipe.

history of his country. The truth of the matter was that there had been so little time in his life for reading. When he had been Count Ledochowski's stableman he had had to work eighteen hours a day, and when he had finished he had been so exhausted he had fallen into bed. When he had bought his own piece of land he had had to work long grueling hours building a home, tilling the soil, raising his children and trying in every way to make ends meet. Once again there had been no time for reading. But on that memorable evening when Ewa read the poem, after everyone had gone to bed, he picked up one of the children's schoolbooks and began to read about the history of his fatherland. In the beginning he had some difficulty, but with each hour that passed, each day and month, it had become easier. In a few years he had acquired more knowledge of his country's past than anyone else in the village. Soon he had begun to buy papers and books from the city with his carefully hoarded pennies, because he had read every book in the school library. The history of his country became as familiar to him as the legends of his own village. He learned with pride that the first dynasty of Polish kings had descended from the peasant family of Piast. Today there were thousands by that name, including the Piastowskis and the Piastowiczs. With the passing of time the simple names like Piast, Goral, Kowal had acquired new endings and had become known as Piastowski or Piastowicz; Goralski or Goralowicz; Kowalski or Kowalowicz. For names lived and traveled about, intermingling and changing with the passing of the centuries, as everything else on earth changes. But in the end all stood for one great family, the nation. Piast was the symbol of the thousand-year-history of a people whose ancestors had been simple peasants.

Stefan Piast was deeply pleased that, through so many centuries, his own name had not changed. Although he told no one of this, not even his wife, he cherished the idea that he was

descended from this old, old family of Polish kings, even though today he was no more than a simple poor peasant. Secretly he was happy and proud, but he let no one know his thoughts.

It was this joyful pride that made him want to educate his children at all cost. This was not easy in Poland. Sending the children to public school was not difficult. But *gimnazjum* and university fees were out of the reach of a peasant's pocket. But in spite of this he made every effort to educate his oldest son Janek. But animal-loving, nature-loving Janek, stubborn as a mule about his lessons, barely managed to pass the first few grades of primary school. So after many disappointments, Stefan gave in and left Janek alone with his horses, his fields, and his forests.

Ewa finished public school and was accepted at the *gimnazjum* of the nearby city of Włodzimierz. Dreaming of the future, she made plans to study chemistry at a university. The three younger children, Piotr, Jadwiga, and Mietek, were good at their studies, too, and already planning what they wanted to be. Rather to their father's surprise they had decided to be actors and writers. But Stefan consoled himself with the thought that they still had a long way to go before finishing at the public school.

Janek was soon adept at all the work of the farm and in time was able to take over his father's tasks also. He began to think of marrying a girl from a neighboring farm. Meanwhile the autumn of 1939 was approaching. Besides the golden leaves falling from the oaks, maples, and the sighing birches, Poland's autumns always hold a few unexpected surprises. Sometimes in the autumn heavy rains fall, and in the villages you walk in mud up to your knees. Other years are so dry that the sharpest axe cannot pierce the hard ground. But every year the golden leaves fall, and in the hearts of the people there are faith and hope that the next autumn will be better and more beautiful.

The Polish people are like that, always believing in and hoping for the impossible without rhyme or reason—which makes them appear as fools to others. Then when their dreams are not realized they complain and lament, but almost in the same breath new hopes enter their hearts and soon they are joyous and laughing again. A national trait of the Poles is that, though they have always had too little of everything, they have always had too much of hope.



CHAPTER 2

The Beginning of a Memorable September

STEFAN PIAST had planned a very busy day for the first day of September. In the early morning he intended to drive Ewa and Piotr to the railroad station, where they were to board a train for the small city of Włodzimierz. Summer vacation was over and the children had to return to school. Then after he had returned home and eaten his usual hearty breakfast, he and his eldest son and a Ukrainian neighbor, Franiuk, from the village of Bobicze, would go to the mill in a near-by town. One of Piast's team of bays was lame and Fedor Franiuk had promised to lend him a horse. Both farmers needed flour, so they were going to hitch up the two horses to one of Piast's wagons and drive to the steam mill in Lokacze.

While Stefan was backing his good horse between the shafts of the cart and before Ewa and Piotr had quite finished their breakfast, Janek was suddenly summoned to appear at the municipal building in another village, about eight miles away. It was something about his army papers, so of course Janek would not be able to go to the station or later on to the mill, because a summons from the government must be immediately obeyed. He hurried off to see what it was all about, and Stefan bundled Ewa and Piotr into the cart and set out for the station. Only the two younger children remained at home.

The early dawn foretold that the day would be as fair and warm as if it had been stolen from the middle of summer.

Although the sun had not yet come up, any good farmer could tell what the day would be like by the flawless brightness of the dawn. The grass sparkled with dew and the sky was a deep, serene blue like the eyes of a happy child. Instead of the usual crowing of the cock, which according to the peasants' way of thinking denotes a change in the weather, bird song from the near-by forests broke the early morning quiet. All signs confirmed the fact that the first day of September would be beautiful. And who could tell? Perhaps after the dreary August, the whole month of September would be warm and sunny.

"It looks to me as if this autumn would be long and dry. Perhaps we will be able to dig our potatoes and beets, and we may still have plenty of time to sow our grain," Stefan remarked contentedly to Ewa and Piotr. They were sitting beside him on the high seat of the cart, as they drove toward the railroad station. As if she had not heard what her father said, Ewa turned her pale, delicate face toward her father and inquired anxiously, "Wasn't it strange that Janek should be suddenly ordered to report to the municipal building so early in the morning?"

"Oh, Ewa, you're always worrying about something," exclaimed Piotr in disgust. "Everyone of military age in the village was called this morning. It's nothing to get upset about."

Thirteen-year-old Piotr always tried to give the impression that he knew all there was to know about everything. Stefan was just about to join in the discussion when a man appeared in great haste from the railroad station a short distance down the road and began to run in the direction of the village of Adamowka, which the Piasts had just left. The man raced along as if he were escaping from some terrible catastrophe. Stefan Piast halted the horses because he was afraid that the frenzied stranger would fall under the thill and be crushed by the horses' hoofs. But the man quickly side-stepped the horses and the wagon, calling out hysterically from a distance,

"War! War!" And again from farther down the road, "War!"

"What did you say?" Piast shouted. He looked stunned, as though he could not believe his ears.

"The man cried out, 'war,' " Piotr replied excitedly. "I know who he is, too."

"It is not important whether you know the man or not," said Ewa sharply in a voice that trembled a little. "It's what he said that's important."

"We must find out if it is true," Stefan interrupted, as he loosened the reins and sent the horses along at a gallop to reach the station quickly. In about five minutes he was standing among a group of agitated travelers who were discussing the dreadful news of invasion. Stefan Piast walked over to a man he knew, Jan Biel, who worked as a repair man of the railroad. When he was questioned, Jan sighed deeply and said remorsefully, "I was the one who gave out the terrible news which was telegraphed to this station a little less than an hour ago. We are at war with Germany! Last night Nazi planes bombed Polish cities. Nobody knows the extent of the damage in Warszawa, Lodz, Krakow, Katowice, Poznan, Wilno, and perhaps many other cities. The German army has invaded Poland without a formal declaration of war. They are murdering our people right and left. War, my good Piast, means the destruction of our cities and of our people!"

The muscles in young Biel's strong arms stood out as he clenched his fists. Piast stood still, weeping without a sound. The tears streamed down over his sun-tanned cheeks, but he made no effort to wipe them away, for he was not ashamed of his emotion. He stood motionless like a statue sculptured out of the salt which his ancestors had dug from the salt mines of Wieliczka. Perhaps he was thinking that now only underground places like the salt mines would be safe. Before his blue eyes, swimming in tears, he saw the cities of Poland. Although he had never actually seen them in person, he knew of their



The market place of Pinsk. Some of the charming old cities of Poland were destroyed during the war.



The skyline of the old city of Lwów is dominated by the tower of its splendid medieval cathedral.

beauty from books and the Sunday illustrated newspapers, and he loved them as he loved his own village and his simple thatch-roofed home.

He thought of ancient Krakow, which had been Poland's capital. There on the tower of the church of St. Mary's, every hour for four hundred years a bugler dressed in the costume of Krakow had blown his bugle. Many, many years ago, when the church was new, the trumpeter had sent forth his ringing call only when an enemy was approaching. Later it had become the custom to indicate the passing hours of the day and night in this way. Today, thought Piast mournfully, after the last trumpet call of approaching war has been sounded, perhaps the trumpet call will be heard no more.

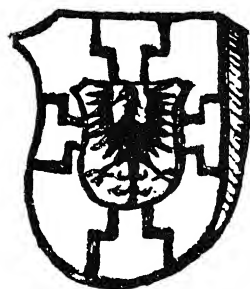
He thought, too, of the present capital, Warszawa, with its old buildings and its beautiful modern ones, of the city of Lwow with its picturesque market place and the old houses clustered near by. Here in the market place children played from morning to night. Piast imagined he could hear their voices filled with innocent joy. He had never traveled far from his village, but he had seen all these places in the pictures. He imagined that he heard the voices of children in Lwow, Warszawa, Poznan, Pinsk—in all the cities of Poland.

Stefan Piast would have stood there longer with tears running down his cheeks, had not the shrill whistle of an approaching train interrupted his visions and brought him to his senses. He jumped as if someone had struck him across the face with a whip and ran toward his wagon where Ewa, pale and worried, sat waiting impatiently with Piotr, who was surrounded by an excited group of children of various ages. Stefan called out to them, "It is war! We must go back home at once!" He leaped up onto the wagon as the children, noticing how alarmed and agitated he was, dispersed quickly. He grabbed up the reins, slapped the flanks of the horses smartly, and soon they were going at a steady gallop toward the village

from which they had just come. As if they sensed something wrong, the horses raced along smoothly. There was hardly time for discussion, even though Ewa and Piotr asked many questions trying to add more details to the information they had received from the children. They did not have to wait long for confirmation of the appalling tidings, for, just as soon as they approached Adamowka, they saw people running along the road as if they had gone crazy, yelling and screaming, "War! War!"

Everywhere there were groups of people standing about weeping quietly or sobbing hysterically. Young boys jumped on wagons and drove at breakneck speed to the municipal building in the village of Mikulicze, which was situated a few miles to the west, to enlist in the army. The older people and children chased the animals and poultry into the pens and coops. Every home was a scene of frenzied action, of bustle and confusion, and a hubbub of noise in which was mixed the lowing of the cows, hissing of the geese, squealing of the pigs, and the cackle of the frightened hens.

Only the golden sun seemed undisturbed and shone in all its splendor in the high blue sky. There was the sharp fragrance of autumn flowers and the earthy scent of freshly cut grass in the air. Nature was not afraid of human panic. She was not worried, for she knows that she is immortal and nothing can destroy her, not even a tank nor an airplane. If a few of her trees and flowers are killed she knows that in the spring new life will come from the earth and everything will be beautiful once again. But for the Polish people in the small villages and in the large cities menacing iron footsteps were drawing near from the west. Each step brought tragedy closer—stark and terrible tragedy—for all the people high or low, because each step was bringing death and destruction upon them. And the name of the tragedy was the "Second World War," and its birthday was September 1, 1939.



CHAPTER 3

A Different World

YES, AUGUST 1939, with its winds and driving rain, its excited, whispered rumors, and its atmosphere of tension had come and gone. Out of the pale, clear sky in the early dawn of September 1, German planes appeared over Poland. The roar of their engines beat on Polish ears and struck at Polish hearts. In groups of three they came, filling the sky like great flocks of wild geese heading south. And these soaring metal birds laid eggs, it seemed, huge metal eggs that exploded with earth-shaking thunder and blinding flashes of flame. Not only military objectives—bridges, railroads, and factories—were carefully and systematically destroyed but, with what appeared to be random fury, churches, homes, schools, and hospitals in large cities and small towns were demolished.

During the following days the bombing increased in tempo, bringing death and destruction even into the smallest communities. Adolf Hitler did things on a grand scale. Against his eastern neighbor, who possessed no more than four hundred and forty-three old-type planes, he sent four thousand, three hundred and twenty planes of the latest and most efficient models. The Polish pilots christened their machines, "coffins," because they well knew the danger that lurked in these old crates.

The German army attacking Poland comprised seventy infantry divisions and fourteen panzer units. The field-gray uni-

formed hordes poured over the borders of Poland at seventeen points, starting from East Prussia, West Prussia in the north, all the way around to Slask, Moravia and Slovakia in the south. Marshall Edward Smigly-Rydz, the commander-in-chief at that time, mobilized all Poland's strength—thirty-one infantry divisions and one panzer unit—against the invader. Thus the German-Polish fire power ratio worked out in the proportion of seventy-two to one. What good did it do that a whole nation rallied together in defense of the country when there were not even guns with which to fight, and a limited quantity of tanks and planes?

The desperate people fought with heart-breaking gallantry. Women in the cities poured boiling water from their windows on the heads of the invaders. Men and boys, clutching bottles of kerosene, threw themselves in front of tanks, sacrificing their lives to blow up the rumbling monsters. But of what avail was all this? Heroism alone could accomplish nothing. An enemy's steel and iron must be met with steel and iron. Hitler's army moved forward rapidly, crushing with its armored might the weak Polish divisions which, at the very beginning, had lost contact with the craven general staff and the supreme commander. And no wonder, for the commander-in-chief, Marshal Edward Smigly-Rydz, at the end of the first week of war had abandoned his headquarters in Warszawa and headed south toward the Rumanian border. After him, stepping on each other's heels and stumbling over one another in the hurried escape, came officials of the government—President Ignacy Moscicki, Prime Minister Slawoj-Skladkowski, and Jozef Beck, the minister of foreign affairs. The nation was left alone to face destruction without the leaders, who for years had lied about the military strength of the country.

The regular Polish army, which withdrew from Slask and Pomorze, might have defended itself at the strategic position of the juncture of the San-Wisla and the Bug-Wisla rivers, but

the German air corps made it impossible for any such last-minute defense. The enemy advanced at an average rate of about forty miles a day. The regular Polish troops joined with the civilians and these mixed troops fought as best they could against odds that were overwhelming from the very start. The tiny Baltic fortress on the Hel peninsula was defended heroically. There a garrison of about two hundred people was able to hold out against five thousand armed soldiers and the fire of German battleships.

The heroism of Warszawa, under the indomitable leadership of Mayor Stefan Starzynski, the socialist M. Niedzialkowski, and the peasant leader M. Rataj, surpassed even that of Madrid during the Spanish civil war. And Madrid had the advantage of its natural rampart of mountains, while the Polish capital on its open plain had no protection at all.

In the air, German bombers met with no resistance either from Polish airplanes or from anti-aircraft guns. Without justification and with a criminal lack of conscience, they bombed cities, towns and villages, throwing the entire Polish countryside into a state of panic and agony.

In the so-called zone of the five rivers, where the Narew, Wisla, Bzura, Rawka, and Pilica make a five-pointed star around Warszawa, the Polish troops might have put up some resistance, for they had the Warszawa fortress of Modlin, as well as the Warszawa system of communications to back them, but the Polish army no longer had a central staff and each general had to make his own decisions and to issue his own blind commands. In spite of all these handicaps, the fight went on furiously. It was in this section of the front that Adolf Hitler and Herman Goering settled accounts with those officers of the German army who opposed them by the simple device of having them shot by Gestapo agents. General Fritsch was one of the victims of this secret purge. The report read that these officers had "been killed in battle." What was easier for the



**COMMONWEALTH
of POLAND
after 1667**

**~ POLAND on
Sept. 1, 1939**

||||| annexed by Prussia

This Map shows Poland after the loss of territory ceded to Russia by the Treaty of Andruszow, which ended the Polish-Russian war of 1654-1667, and after East Prussia ceased to be a Fief of Poland in 1657. Poland retained these boundaries until the First Partition.

Nazis than to do away with any political enemy who opposed them on this small battlefield near Warszawa? Here, where the battle was fast and furious, more than one German officer opposed to Hitler was sacrificed. Long after all other centers of resistance had been overcome and defeated, Warszawa still fought on vainly and heroically.

On the seventeenth of September the Red Army of the Soviet Union occupied the eastern part of Poland. In defense of this action the Soviet Union claimed that it was necessary in order to protect five million Ukrainians and two and a half million White Russians who were living within the existing borders of Poland. According to the Russians, a great percentage of these two nationalities, during the whole twenty years of Poland's independence, had wanted to become a part of the Soviet Union.

With the fall of Warszawa on September 27, 1939, Poland ceased to exist as an independent nation. The dethroned leaders of the old regime had long ago made their escape and were in Rumania, Hungary, and other Balkan countries—some had even gone to Paris and London. The common people remained, and with their experience of past history behind them, made preparations to go underground to fight the German conquerors.

The German army never really reached the village of Adamowka except with its planes, which destroyed and burned many buildings and killed about one-third of the people. The Piast family emerged from the nightmare alive, but each one, including the youngest son, Mietek, was injured in some way. They owed their lives to the protection of the stone cellar which Stefan Piast had built behind the house a number of years before the war. In times of peace this cellar stored potatoes, barrels of sauerkraut, beets, apples, and all the other foods that were raised on the fertile farm. But in September 1939, when the German planes rained death from the skies, the

whole family found refuge here. But now where were they to live? On the third day of the war their whole farm had been destroyed, together with all the livestock. All that was left after the holocaust was the stone cellar with its store of vegetables and fruits. Valiantly they worked to make the cellar livable. They cleaned it thoroughly, stacked the produce neatly at one side, placed a table in the center, surrounded by a few chairs and benches which they salvaged from their home. All that remained of their wardrobes was the clothes on their backs. Everything else had been burned by incendiary bombs.

Janek Piast, the eldest son, who had marched away with his regiment, never came home again. He had died on the field of battle. A neighbor, Adam Piotrowski, who had fought beside Janek in the same infantry detachment, brought back this heart-breaking news. During one of the enemy tank attacks, Janek and a few others had refused to retreat. Young Piast was manning a machine gun but when the tanks came near enough, he began to hurl hand grenades under their huge iron bellies. He never threw his last grenades—he hadn't time—for a German gunner spied him. There was a blinding flash, a deafening roar, and Janek, the grenades, and the German tank were blown to bits.

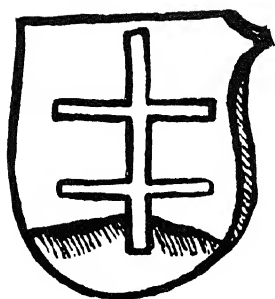
Like so many other mothers all over Poland, Maria Piast grieved over the loss of her son. In moments such as these the only comfort a mother could find was in her prayers. Maria went to the old stone church in the neighboring town of Lokacze and with a few hoarded bits of silver paid for a holy mass to be said for the peace of her son's soul, which she believed must be wandering somewhere over the fields outside the city of Kutno, where the bloody battle in which he had died had been fought.

While she was gone, Stefan and the children worked furiously to build some sort of home for themselves, for the cellar was very cold and damp. In the evening after they had eaten

their supper of potatoes baked in the ashes of their open fire, and sauerkraut from the small store that remained in the cellar, they all knelt down in front of their burned home to pray for Janek's soul. Prayer was an escape for them from the terrible reality. It seemed to bring them comfort and made them feel for a moment that they were close to Janek again.

All the Piasts believed that sooner or later punishment would come to those who had sown hate and destruction among the Polish people. Mr. Piast rose from his knees murmuring as if to himself, "I firmly believe that a black hour of ruin and death will come to the German nation for destroying our villages and cities and for murdering our innocent children. And when that black hour comes, I do not want it to spare our traitors, the Moscickis, the Becks, the Smigly-Rydzs and their kind, who have for so many years deceived our unfortunate nation."

No one replied to these bitter and sorrowful words. The only sound to be heard was the wailing of the wind as it blew the ashes of the Piasts' burned home here and there over the countryside. The darkness of the autumn night settled down around them, shutting out the devastated and barren land.



CHAPTER 4

Mr. Piast Reaches into the Past

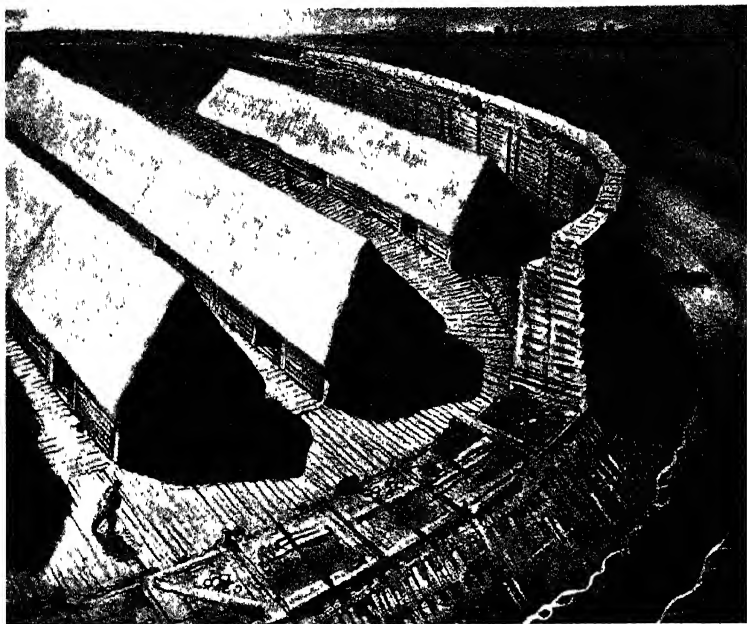
THE GERMAN INVASION in September 1939 brought to an end the independence of Poland. Difficult times came for the whole nation. Stefan Piast, along with millions of other average citizens, suffered every kind of material hardship and, with the full realization of what it meant to be under the brutal subjugation of the new form of German imperialism known as Nazism, a great spiritual distress as well. During the long days while he was working to rebuild his farm, Stefan, like many other Poles, found that his thoughts kept turning to his country's past. Certainly its last political form of military dictatorship had brought no good to him or his fellow countrymen. But he knew now that he and his compatriots must see to it that in the future they worked together to bring about equality of opportunity and justice in this land which their fathers and forefathers had built.

Adamowka was located in that part of Poland occupied by the Russians, and, although no one bothered him under Soviet rule, Stefan somehow felt deserted and at a loss, and the thought of the other Poles who were being biologically extirpated by the Nazis in the other parts of Poland occupied by the Germans made his heart heavy with sorrow.

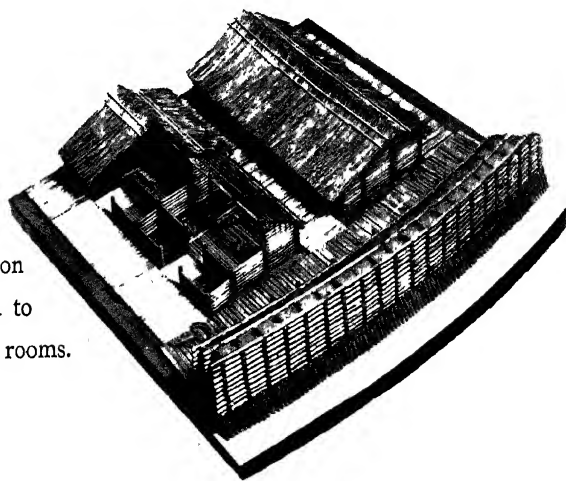
In the evenings after his work was done, Stefan Piast began again to read books that told of the past history of his nation. This study of history gave him the courage to live and a hope



A prehistoric dwelling.



RECONSTRUCTION of prehistoric houses of western Poland. These show that the Slavic peoples early made permanent settlements.



Houses with portion
of thatch removed to
show division of rooms.

for a better future for Poland. His attitude is understandable, for when man is afflicted with personal or national tragedy, he unconsciously tries to recall the past. One person will seek to find the reasons for present tragedy in the events of the past, and another will try to make comparisons between the present and the past. Mr. Piast had a third reason—he wanted to become thoroughly familiar with the history of his country, with which he was not too well acquainted. And besides if the truth were known, he enjoyed reading history books just as much as he enjoyed eating the potato pancakes with sour cream which his wife always made for him on Sunday.

In the early dawn of June 22, 1941, Stefan Piast, brooding over his history books, was shocked out of his dreams of Poland's past. Adolf Hitler, intoxicated by the rapid conquests of his army in western Europe, launched an attack on the Soviet Union. The Austrian painter and paper hanger confidently believed that what other German leaders had not been able to accomplish in the course of a thousand years, he could achieve in a short time. The dream of the Germans had always been *Drang nach Osten*—drive to the East—the complete destruction of the Slavs, who for so many centuries had prevented the realization of German hopes of ruling the lands of Poland, Ukrainia, Russia, and White Russia. When Adolf Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, he had not only the approval of his Nazi party, the army, and the German nation, but he also had the blessings of the old German gods and of all the leaders of the nation who had lived during the course of previous centuries.

The present attack was but the beginning of another attempt by Germany to overrun the rich eastern lands of the Slavs. The whole world waited in great tension for the result of the contest between the highly trained German army and the last of the Slavic states.

Stefan Piast made up his mind that the time had come when

he could no longer sit back and be a spectator. He hurriedly packed some clothes, gathered up a few of his beloved history books, and, with his wife and children, fled to the East to escape the onrush of the German hordes. Before and after him streamed hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, Poles, and White Russians. They moved by night and hid in the forests during the day, terrified by the German planes, flying low to machine-gun the innocent and exhausted civilians. On their long and painful eastward journey, the Piast family met regiments of determined Soviet soldiers, moving slowly with their heavy armaments and tanks in the direction of the enemy.

Stefan Piast had learned from history that in such hard and critical moments of German invasion, all the Slavic nations must unite and fight together against the enemy, for they could accomplish nothing alone. He realized this afresh when he saw what his country was now suffering, and he vowed that he would remember and see that his children understood and remembered. But for the moment, he decided, he would have to cease his philosophizing about history and do what he could to help in the war against this hated common enemy. With this purpose in mind, as soon as he arrived with his family in the city of Ostrog, he immediately sought out the Soviet administrators and offered his services.

But when he had been given a medical examination by the army doctors, Stefan Piast was told that he was not fitted to bear arms. He insisted that if he could not fight, he could at least work behind the lines at something essential to the prosecution of the war. After a short rest in the old city of Ostrog, he was told that he and his family were to be sent into the interior of the Soviet Union to work. They were assigned places on a train headed toward the far east of Soviet Russia, where they were all to be given work on a farm. This slow journey on the crowded railroad car lasted for a number of long weeks. From the windows of the train Stefan Piast saw the spacious

Ukrainian plains rippling with ripening wheat, rye, and other grains. He saw the picturesque villages humming with activity and the menacing smoke from the factory chimneys in Russian cities. Sometimes when the slow-moving train passed near highways, he saw long columns of Soviet soldiers marching continually west. Farther and farther east went the train, sometimes stopping to allow faster trains jammed with troops to pass, or to pick up fuel and water. During the long, tiresome days of their travels, Piast and his family became acquainted with the other people in the car. They made tea together and ate the black bread and salt pork which was their chief food.

Now Stefan Piast had plenty of spare time, so he read aloud or talked about Poland's past with his children and the other children on the train. He longed with all his heart to instill in them a love for the history of their unfortunate country, and he wanted to make certain it was the kind of love that is based on the true facts of history. Many of the older children, who had been taught a biased and distorted version of history in the official schools, would argue with him and he had quite a job on his hands trying to convince them of the real facts. His oldest daughter, Ewa, who was so much like him both physically and in her love for the truth, often came to his assistance.

Noticing how absorbed the blue-eyed Ewa was in these historical and political discussions, her mother would shake her head and say, "It seems to be always like this; as soon as my children grow up they lose interest in me and turn to their father." She would smile a little sadly and go on talking to the women with whom she had made friends. Then with renewed energy, she would take up her darning and go on with the mending of a pair of trousers belonging to her youngest son, Mietek. The other women sitting with her sewing or mending their husbands' or children's clothes nodded their heads in agreement with Maria Piast.

To the adolescent children in a Polish peasant's family, the father is not only the man of the house, but also an adviser on every type of problem, whether it be domestic, social, or political. The mother, on the other hand, is the comforter in times of trouble. Usually the father with his explanations makes the children more inquisitive and curious—which many times leads them into additional trouble. But the mother is there to comfort them with her serene and motherly air and to straighten out their difficulties. Whenever Stefan Piast's children asked him questions, he always tried to give them examples from the history of the development of society. He tried to clarify both the small happenings of the day and momentous current events by reaching into the past for explanations, either from Polish history or from the history of the world at large. For, as we have seen, history to Stefan Piast was the mother of knowledge and of life. Knowing what Poland had lived through in the past gave him a better understanding of the miserable situation he and his family and all of Poland's peasant and working class had to face today.

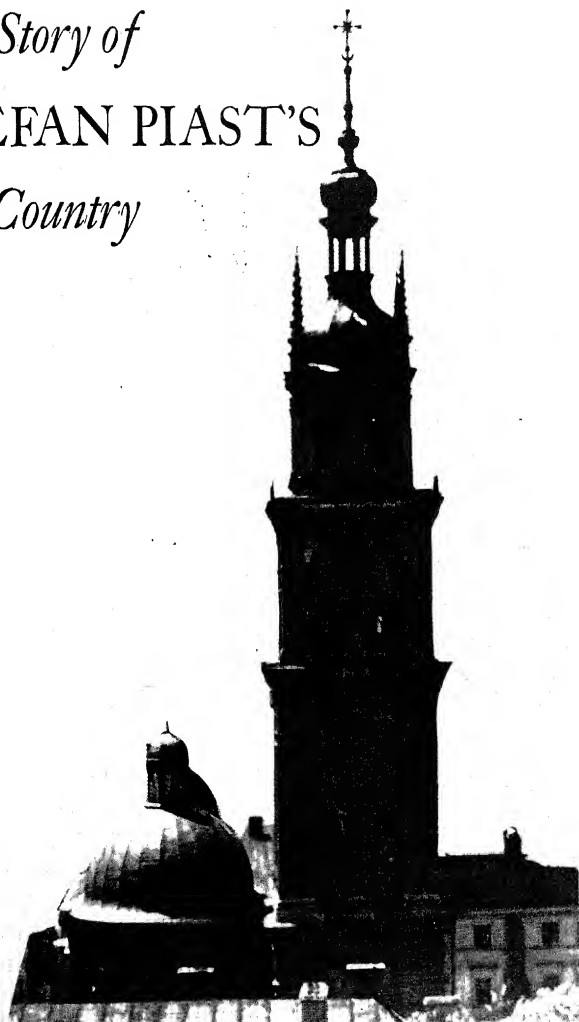
Now for the time being this Polish family's journey was coming to an end. They were approaching the Altai territory in Southern Siberia, where they, and other families like them, were to work on farms or help clear the forests. This was the only way they and thousands of other Poles, who were not capable of carrying arms, could help the Soviet Union in her struggle with their common enemy, the imperialistic German nation of Hitler.

Soon the Piasts were settled on the large farm where they were to help with the harvest. Once again in the evenings after his work in the fields was done, Stefan would sit and read his books. Sometimes his wife and children would join him while he read aloud about the development of his country after the end of the Piast dynasty. When his voice grew hoarse, his daughter Ewa would take the book and read in her sweet,

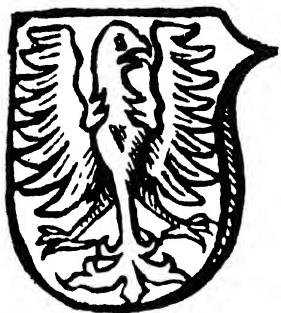
clear voice, full of the confidence of youth in the future.

History taught them wisdom and gave them courage to work and live. It gave them hope for the future. For the story that they read was of a country many times subjugated and denuded, but holding always to its faith in independence.

The Story of
STEFAN PIAST'S
Country



*HERE WE SEE the main events in
the history of Poland. Especially we
see the growth of culture, and the
tangled relationships of the country
with its powerful neighbors.*



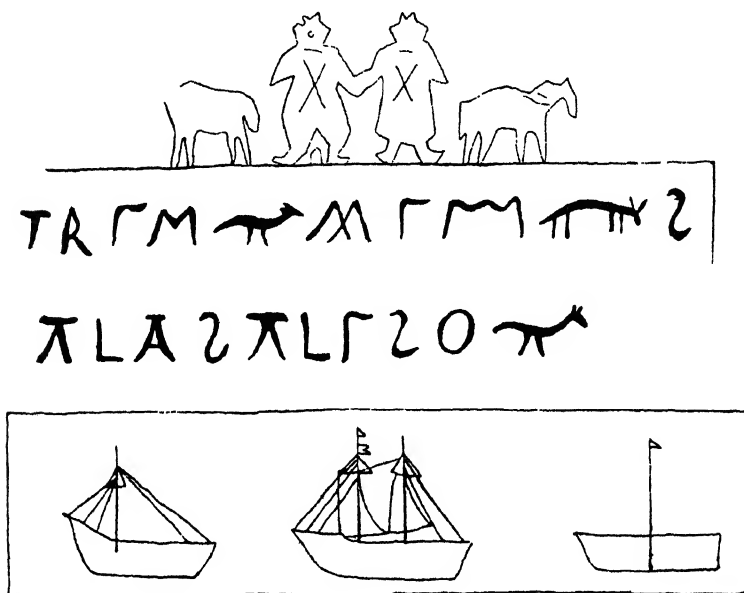
CHAPTER 5

Beginnings of Poland

ONE OF the cradles of the Slavic line lay in the area north of the Carpathian Mountains, from the town of Kostopol to the village of Machow, where about a hundred early Slavic graves were found. By their structure and by the simple ornaments which had been interred within them, these graves showed that they belonged to the Lusatian Culture. This name came from the territory of Lusatia, which was situated northwest of Slask and between central Germany and Poland. The earliest trace of this culture goes back to the third period of the Montelius Bronze Epoch about 1300 to 1100 B.C. It was the custom in that era to burn the bodies of the dead and to place the ashes in clay vessels. At the beginning of the era, the urns were very simply made with sharp outlines and with irregular bumps and lines carved on the top. As time went by the shape of the vessels became rounder and their dull gray color became darker and glossier. Some of them were even covered with polychromatic colors.

Other excavations in the village of Biskupin proved that this Lusatian Culture was the beginning of ancient Slavic civilization. The people led an agricultural existence on a much higher level than any other European peoples of that time. Gradually besides agriculture they began to deal in trade and to do creditable handicraft. The great number of urns filled with ashes gave evidence that this terrain had been well populated and

had had a strong social organization. The influence of the Lusatian Culture spread to central Germany on the west, to the Bug River in Poland on the east, and to the Carpathian Mountains on the south. Later, its influence was extended to the Bohemians, Moravians, and Slovaks, starting in the south and spreading to the north to the Baltic Sea and in the east to Ruthenia.



In the fifth century B.C. the Lusatian Culture gradually changed to the form known today under the name of the culture of chest graves. Instead of preserving the ashes of a single individual in an urn, big clay chests carved with human heads held the ashes of entire families. At this time the Slavic followers of this culture began to lose territory to the south, such as Bohemia, Moravia, and part of Slask, to the warlike Celtic tribes. Meanwhile the Germanic tribes conquered the

Slavic territory in the west up to the river Oder. Only in the east and in the north the culture of the chest graves survived, influencing not only what is today East Prussia but Lithuania as well. It lasted for about five hundred years and in the course of the first century after Christ changed into another form of culture called Przeworska.

In the first and second centuries after Christ a revival of the western Slavs took place under the leadership of the Polanie tribe. Excavations of ornamental objects—earrings, necklaces, and decorated arms—gave evidence of the widespread influence of these western Slavs. In the third and fourth centuries after Christ they reunited with the Bohemians, Moravians, and Slovaks, who had long ago been conquered and ruled by the Celts. In the west, they forced the Germans far back beyond the Elbe River. For the next few centuries the boundaries of these Slavic territories remained static. In the year 805, even the Emperor Charles the Great, who had the support of the Pope, was afraid to antagonize his Slavic neighbors on the east and established a border line with them by peaceful negotiation.

Meanwhile, the Slavs living on the north of the Carpathians further developed their agricultural and trade relations with their neighbors and began to build castle strongholds to defend their lands. In this way, Krak, a leader of one tribe, established Krakow; Bolech built Bolechow; Poz established Poznan; and Sedomir founded Sandomierz. These strongholds—now great modern bustling cities—still exist in the twentieth century.

Over all this territory, extending south as far as the Carpathian Mountains and north to the Baltic Sea, and beyond the river Oder on the west, and to the Bug River on the east, castle strongholds were built for defensive purposes. These fortresses were constructed of hard wood, such as oak or beach wood, with high battlemented ramparts, surrounded by moats. Such citadels were situated in places additionally protected by

the natural surroundings—near unpassable swamps or on high hills overlooking the land on all sides. Within the castles, plenty of grain and fuel was stored in preparation for an enemy siege. There was also stored a great variety of arms—bows and arrows, spears, javelins, and axes. Whenever the signal was given that an enemy was approaching, the women and children and old men took refuge in some safe hiding place within the solid walls, while the strong young men rushed to the best places from which to attack the enemy. In the center of the fortress at Krakow, the Slavs living north of the Carpathian Mountains placed a statue of their highest god, Swiatowid. The statue was made of wood, carved with various images, and had four faces. Surrounding the statue was a grove of slender oak trees which in the summer shaded the god and his worshippers from the sun and in the winter protected them from the snow. On holidays gifts of honey, wheat pancakes, and freshly killed livestock were offered to the statue of Swiatowid by the people. In winter they celebrated the holy day of the god Goda; in the spring, the day of the goddess of Marzanna; and in the summer, that of the god Kupala. Even today some of these pagan customs are still retained in Poland. For instance, there is *Dyngus*, which is the practice of pouring water over someone early in the morning of the second day of Easter. This custom remains from the ancient days when an effigy of Marzanna was bathed in water as a sign of the beginning of spring. The present-day custom of throwing wreaths into the Wisla, the mother of Polish rivers, during the summertime, and lighting bonfires on the Eve of St. John can be traced to the ancient worshipers of Kupala.

The main occupation of the old Slavs was the cultivation of the soil. For this they used such implements as picks and wooden ploughs. They also fished with nets and hunted bears, deer, buffalo, and boars, with bows and arrows. The women wove cloth from flax and hemp. In the beginning every family

obeyed the oldest man of the house. He distributed the work, settled quarrels, and led all ceremonies and rituals. Then related clans, living near each other, met for consultations, each clan headed by its leader. After a time, the most outstanding and bravest leader was chosen at these meetings to be the chief of the group. These leaders of a group of clans became known as princes. One very energetic and clever prince, named Polan, was supposed to have united and ruled all the Slavic tribes on the north of the Carpathian Mountains. In Polish, *Pole* means field. The name of this first prince, Polan, came from this Polish word for field, and the name of the country over which he ruled was called Polska and the people who lived on his lands were known as Polanie and, today, Polacy.

One of the successors of Prince Polan was a man named Piast, who ruled until the year 860. In that year, after Piast's death, his oldest son, Ziemowit, became ruler. During the period of his reign he united the Slavs on the rivers Warta, Notec, and Wisla. In the year 891, Prince Leszek took over the power and expanded the territory still further. In 944, Lešek's son, Ziemomysl, issued a proclamation announcing that all Slavs residing between the Baltic Sea, the Oder River, the Carpathian Mountains, and almost to the source of the Bug and Niemen rivers, belonged to his lands. It is not definitely known how much attention the people in these Slavic areas paid to this lordly edict of the ambitious Polish prince, but history states that at certain periods the Poles governed these territories.

This clever and shrewd prince, Ziomomysl, picked the white eagle as his emblem. From that time on, the white eagle (the red background was added later) has been the Polish national emblem.

The shape of the eagle, which is now used in modern Poland and on flags and State seals, is the exact replica of the symbol used by King Stefan Batory, who reigned from 1576 to 1586. To this day, every Polish child when he begins to learn to read

and write is taught to memorize the following four lines:

"Kto ty jesteś?

"Polak mały.

"Jaki znak twój?

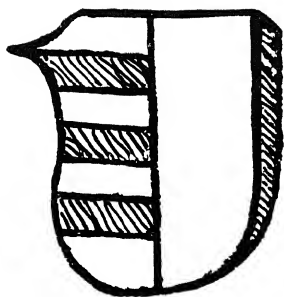
"Orzeł Biały."

"Who are you?

"A Polish mite.

"What is your symbol?

"The Eagle White."



CHAPTER 6

Three Legends

BEFORE THE DAYS of recorded history there are many legends about the life of the early Poles, most of them familiar to the people.

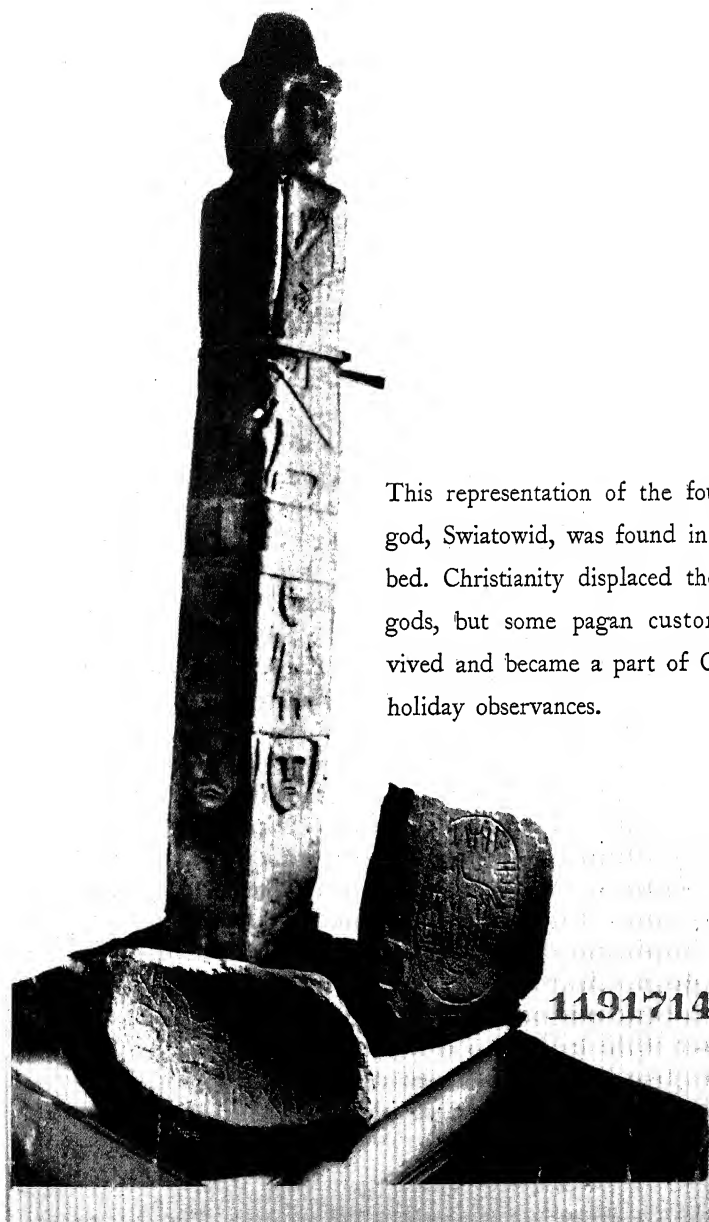
Two of these legends are about Krakow. The first one is the legend of the castle of Prince Krak, for whom Krakow is said to have been named. Not far from the source of the largest Polish river, the Wisla, which takes the form of the letter S and flows through the whole of the country, Prince Krak built an enormous castle stronghold on the Wawel hill. The waters of the queen of Polish rivers protected this castle, which was also encircled by a high battlemented wall. The fortress had many towers with one great turret, used for a lookout post, dominating all the rest. Prince Krak, his family, his knights, and his retainers all lived in the castle. In the center of the courtyard, near the well which furnished the water for the castle, stood a splendid statue of the high god, Swiatowid. Inside the great walls of the citadel, beside the rooms in which the people lived, there were the stables for the horses, and wooden buildings where stores of rye, wheat, oats, meat, and arms were kept. The lodgers in this stronghold were mostly the knights who, under the leadership of Krak, patrolled the surrounding fields and forests. They watched over the peasants working in the fields, tending the beehives, chopping wood, and catching fish. At various intervals, the castle was

attacked by the Germanic tribes and Krak and his knights had to fight in its defense. This they did with such valor that they were many times victorious.

Life went on in this way and Krak's lands developed and became richer. Until one day, as the legend goes, news was brought to the prince, that beyond the stronghold under the Wawel hill lived a horrible and powerful dragon. This monster had been slaughtering cows and sheep in the vicinity, and even the people themselves. Prince Krak knew that neither a spear nor a bow and arrow would destroy so terrible a beast. An idea came to him and he resolved to carry it out immediately. He ordered one of his men to kill a sheep and remove its skin. He filled the skin with sulphur, sewed it up, and threw it in front of the dragon's cave. When the monster saw the sheep, he jumped on it greedily and swallowed it in a single gulp. After a few minutes had passed, he became very thirsty because the sulphur was burning his stomach. He managed to crawl over to the river Wisla and began to drink the water. He drank and drank until he burst—and that was the end of the monstrous dragon.

Krak gained the love and respect of his people for saving them from this terrible monster through his act of courage and wisdom. He became a symbol of heroism and sagacity to his people ever after. After Krak's death, his grateful followers buried him, and over his grave they built a high mound of earth in honor of his memory. Around Krak's grave and his castle there slowly grew up, as the years passed, one of Poland's largest cities, Krakow.

The second legend tells that Prince Krak had a beautiful daughter named Wanda, and a German prince, Rytigier, knew of this. When news reached him of the death of her father, Rytigier decided that he would lead his men to the castle and ask for the girl's hand in marriage. The wily Rytigier was only using this as an excuse, for, under the pretense of



This representation of the four-faced god, Swiatowid, was found in a river bed. Christianity displaced the pagan gods, but some pagan customs survived and became a part of Christian holiday observances.

1191714

marriage, he and his knights intended to enter the fortress and forcefully take over the Slavic territory. But Princess Wanda had inherited her father's astuteness. She refused Rytygier's offer of marriage, sent by a messenger, and announced that if the German prince dared put a foot over her borders without permission, he and his men would be instantly killed. What was more, she notified her council of knights that she was prepared to stand at their head and lead her men into battle. And doubly to insure the victory, she worshipped all night in front of the statue of Swiatowid. Since she knew that for such a victory their god would want more than a pot of honey or a sheep, she offered him her own life.

The Germanic knights, under the leadership of Prince Rytygier, approached the castle. The Polish regiments stood waiting for them in the fields far to the west of the Wisla River. It was a cruel, bloody battle, but Swiatowid, the god, kept his promise and brought victory to the Polish knights. Prince Rytygier, in desperation, committed suicide on the field of battle. His knights escaped in terror from Slavic territory, heading west from whence they had come. Princess Wanda kept her word to Swiatowid, by throwing herself into the currents of the Wisla, as a sacrifice in payment for the great victory and the saving of her domain. Thus she became for all eternity the symbol of the greatest sacrifice a Polish woman could make for the good of her country. The grateful people of her land bestowed the same honor upon her as they had upon her father, and, in memory of her patriotism and courage, they built a huge mound of earth which still stands in Poland today.

Alongside of these mounds in memory of Prince Krak and his daughter Wanda, hundreds of years later Polish peasants erected another mound in memory of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, the leader of the Insurrection of 1794. Commander Kosciuszko not only fought against enemy invaders but even battled against internal dragons in the form of noblemen who kept the poor

peasants in slavery, and state matters in a great confusion.

In another part of the country, a third legend was born in prehistoric times. Far to the north of the castle of Krak stood the stone fortress of Kruszwica with its high observation tower overlooking Lake Goplo. In this stronghold a cruel Prince, named Popiel, lived with his wife. He was sly, greedy, and corrupt. His infamy was widespread among his own people living on the shores of Lake Goplo, and even among the people who lived near the rivers Warta and Notec. Prince Popiel could not persuade his uncles who reigned over the territories near these two rivers to come under his rule, so he began to scheme and plan in his sly way how to bring this about. He thought that if he disposed of his uncles it would be very easy to seize their dominions, provinces near the rivers Notec and Warta, where peaceful, hardworking peasants lived. With the assistance of his crafty wife, he arranged a big celebration. There was a great feast at which lamb, fish, wheat pancakes, and barrels of wine were served. Unnoticed by anyone, Popiel placed poison made from the roots of swamp plants in the beautifully carved goblets from which his uncles were to drink. The feast was at its height when all twelve of Popiel's uncles became deathly sick. One after another they collapsed, falling to the floor, and soon they were all dead.

During the remainder of the evening, Popiel was deliriously happy, singing and dancing in his joy over his victory, for, as he was the only living heir, all his uncles' territories would now belong to him. But, alas, unfortunately for him, before the long black night was over, the dead bodies of his uncles changed into a swarm of mice and began to attack him and his wife. Terrified, the two murderers tried to hide or even to escape somehow from the castle. But the mice followed in throngs after them. Popiel ran wildly to the lookout tower, which was surrounded by a moat, but the mice swam across and bit Popiel and his wife to death. To this day, on Lake

Goplo in the city of Kruszwica stands an isolated tower which is called "Popiel's mouse tower." It stands as a warning and a symbol of the punishment that shall be meted out to all greedy and villainous politicians such as Popiel.



CHAPTER 7

Christianity Comes to Poland

MR. PIAST, good Catholic that he was, read with intense interest the story of how his country had adopted the religion that had long been his support and his comfort.

It was in the beginning of the second half of the tenth century. On the west of the Oder River a powerful and despotic king, Otto the Great, reigned over the mighty Germanic State. Otto was inspired by a boundless ambition—he yearned to rule the whole world. As a first step in this direction, he invaded and conquered Italy and forced the Pope to confer upon him the title of Emperor. To his own country, he gave the name of Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Thus equipped and arrayed in his high-sounding titles, Otto set out to conquer Europe. He forced the French, Danes, Burgundians, and the Bohemians into submission, making them his vassals and requiring them to pay contributions to his treasury. In the south-eastern part of his state and under his guiding hand, there governed a margrave named Gero, an arrogant and ruthless individual whose greatest pleasure seemed to be the extermination of the Slavs. Gero called his favorite pastime “converting barbaric peoples to the Christian faith.”

Filled with the holy zeal of his noble purpose, the warlike margrave, under the direction of his Emperor, annihilated more than one-third of the entire population of the Wends, the Serbs, and other Slavic tribes. Upon the remainder of the Slavs whom

he had not murdered, he imposed German rule and forced upon them the Christian faith.

Otto decided that the next step on his program was to move east beyond the river Oder and attack the Polish State under Prince Mieszko, the great-grandson of Piast. Seizing an opportune moment, he sent his knights across the Oder River, near the city of Frankfurt, to stage an attack at this point against the Poles. Because his decimated regiments, just returned from battle, were exhausted after a victorious fight with the Pomeranians, Mieszko could put up no opposition and he had to surrender. He was forced to become the vassal to Margrave Gero, who ruled over the eastern part of the domain of the Emperor Otto the Great. The Emperor was at that time the official spreader and propagator of the Christian religion in Europe—the Pope himself had nominated him—so Mieszko found it necessary to agree to accept Christianity for himself and his people.

Prince Mieszko realized the desperate situation with which he was confronted. If he accepted the Christian faith from the powerful Germans he knew that his country would be completely lost. There would be an immediate influx of German spies and knights disguised as monks and priests. Soon his fields, forests, lakes, and, what was more important to him, his people, would all be exploited for the benefit of the mighty Otto. On the other hand, he knew, if he refused, his people would be massacred under the pretext of converting them to Christianity. He was well aware of what had happened just recently to other Slavs—to the Serbs and the Wends. Pondering his dilemma, in desperation he decided to accept this new faith from the Bohemians, a weaker and less warlike nation. With this idea, he signed a treaty with Prince Boleslav, the ruler of Bohemia, and married his lovely sister, Dobravka, in the year 965.

In the spring of the following year Bohemian priests and



The eagle with medallions of kings appears in a Polish history book—a unique and amusing conception.

bishops began to arrive in the Polish State. Prince Mieszko commanded his people to burn all pagan temples and statues, even those of their highest god, Swiatowid. The pagan priests were relieved of their religious duties and ordered to perform manual labor in the fields. Naturally there was much disturbance and violence among the people, who had for centuries believed in these pagan customs and worshipped these pagan gods. A bitter struggle ensued between the pagans and the priests and knights. But in the end, Mieszko was the victor. Through his messengers, he explained to the people, living in the various settlements throughout the country, that they must accept Christianity or die at the hands of the Germans. The people listened and obeyed, trusting in the good faith of their prince. Places were designated and times appointed for their christening. The christenings took place near lakes and rivers where the Bohemian priests and monks drew water and sanctified it with their blessings. Then when this was done, they sprinkled the holy water over the heads of the Polish pagans, consummating the first step in the beginning of Christianity in Poland.

Mieszko received permission from the Pope to build the first diocese in Poland. It was established in 966 in the city of Poznan. After this solemn ceremony was over, the Polish prince decided that his next mission was to pay a visit to the German Emperor. This he did, bowing before Otto and offering him elaborate and costly presents—skins, grains, and arms. His purpose was to gain the Emperor's friendship and get him to order the Margrave Gero to stop plundering Poland. When his pleas were unheeded by the great Emperor, the Polish prince, through the church dignitaries, turned to the Pope for help. The Pope intervened, coming to the defense of the young Christian country.

From the accomplishments of Mieszko, the first Polish prince of history, it is easy to see that he was a good politician, capable

of looking out for the best interests of his country. When his first wife, the lovely Bohemian Dobravka, died, he married the nun, Oda, who was related to the family of a powerful German prince. This political marriage strengthened his hand still more. He needed peace to build better defensive strongholds, to clear the forests, drill his knights, produce iron arms, and to organize a stronger administration, and this peace he secured by his wisdom and courage.

Even though Mieszko was an absolute ruler, as were the princes of those times, still he did not think always of profiting from the individuals in his power. His main purpose and interest were to develop and strengthen his country. To insure his sovereignty, he employed every expedient he could contrive to build his country into a strong power, so that no adventurous and warlike German knights from the west could rule over his dominions.



CHAPTER 8

The First King

PRINCE MIESZKO met his death fighting with the Lusatian tribes who had been provoked by the Germans to wage war against him. And so, in the year 992, the country was divided among his young sons, as was the custom in those days. The young princes were entrusted to the care of their mother, Oda, and the influential Polish knights. Because they expected to gain great profit for themselves by exploiting the peasants and the merchants in the land under their control, the powerful knights guarded the young princes well. In the newly formed young countries, conditions went from bad to worse, because each one of the many sons of Mieszko, or rather their knightly advisers, ruled only to benefit their own pockets. The oldest of the sons, whose mother had been Mieszko's first wife, Dobravka, was named Boleslaw Piast. He was exceedingly ambitious and dreamed of acquiring great power by uniting all the Slavic nations.

His first victory was against the Bohemians, who had invaded the southwest of Poland. Then he was successful again in his fight with the Ruthenians. His fame as a warrior began to be widespread not only among his own people but among his enemies as well. Princes of neighboring states did their utmost to avoid him as much as possible. Before long he had driven his younger brothers and their counselors out of their territories, and in this brutal way he united all the different

parts of the country into one nation. When this unification took place, he ruthlessly ordered the few hundred knights who were opposed to him to be killed. He also conquered the Slavic tribes living near the Baltic Sea, who were constantly being incited by the German monks to resist him. In his high-handed fashion he dominated practically the whole area along the Wisla River, and this enabled him to transport grain, skins, and armor on rafts from Krakow and other centers to all parts of the country. In the year 999, he conquered all of Slask and Slovakia, uniting them with his country.

In his swift and triumphant battles he used well-armed regiments usually consisting of about thirty thousand knights. Of course these soldiers were equipped with the best weapons the times afforded. They wore suits of armor plate and they carried sharp swords, hatchets, spears, and bows and arrows. About one-third of them rode on small, fast-moving Polish horses. Mounted on these swift, well-trained steeds, the vanguard of the army was able to move about easily and quickly from place to place. Behind the knights on horseback came the foot soldiers, who plundered and killed the settlers and seized the wealthy, making them slaves and kidnapping their women. All that they left behind them after their terrible onslaughts was decay and corruption, a few old people and young children. The people everywhere were in terror of bloody Prince Boleslaw. Even the German margraves were afraid to attack him alone and frantically turned to Emperor Otto the Third for help. But he could do nothing because he could not get unanimous approval from his princes or permission from the Pope to attack the ever-expanding Polish State. Boleslaw was a clever politician and paid his "contributions of St. Peter" regularly and lavishly to Pope Sylvester the Second. He bent every effort to beguile the Pope into making him the spreader of Christianity among the Slavs in the East and North, instead of Otto the Third. The Emperor was well aware of Boleslaw's

ambitions, but what could he do? There seemed only one way out—he would have to lower himself to the extent of visiting the brutal Polish prince and trying peacefully to settle various political problems, and especially to come to an understanding over who was to control the subjugated but rebellious areas near the Polish border.

An occasion and an excuse for this visit arose when the Pope gave Prince Boleslaw his consent to form an archbishopric in Gniezno in the year 1000. When the Emperor arrived for the celebration, he was astounded at the magnificence and splendor displayed by this vassal prince of the Piast family. On the border, waiting to welcome him, was Boleslaw, surrounded by his knights in shining armor. All were seated on well-groomed horses and held long sharp spears. As he gazed in awe at all this, the Emperor could not help but think to himself that this was a very different spectacle from that which had greeted his father, when the German knights had with no difficulty overpowered the primitive and ill-equipped Poles under Mieszko. Then they had been on foot, clad only in skins, with wooden lances in their hands and bows and arrows slung over their shoulders.

About this reception prepared by Boleslaw for the German Emperor, a chronicler of that time named Gallus wrote:

“When the Emperor set foot in Boleslaw’s country, he was greeted with one surprise after another. First to appear were many elegant and colorfully dressed knights. Next the noblemen approached along the spacious plain, all lined up as in a large chorus, only their variously colored, elaborate garments separating them from the other groups. There were great variety, splendor, and color in the clothing worn, since, as you must know and understand, every knight and lady in the Prince’s court wore only pure silks and richly brocaded materials instead of the more commonly used woolens and linens. Even the furs of the noblemen at the Prince’s



A woodcut from Gwagnin representing Boleslaw the Brave and symbolizing the fighting spirit of the early Polish Kings.

court were covered with rich and expensive materials.

"After witnessing this magnificence and wealth," Gallus continues, "the Emperor remarked incredulously, 'I swear on the crown of my Empire that this grand and elaborate spectacle which I see before me, is even greater than I ever could imagine.'"

The Emperor consulted his dignitaries and then he made a little speech in which he said, "I think it is appropriate for us to call this outstanding man not just count or prince but to bestow upon him a king's diamonds."

With these words, the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation removed his emperor's diadem and placed it on Boleslaw's head. Naturally after this ostentatious reception and the warm words that were spoken between them, the two came to a mutual understanding. The Emperor even bestowed upon Boleslaw the honorary title of Patrician of the Holy Roman Empire.

But this new-found brotherliness was soon dissolved by the death of Otto the Third, a short time after he returned to his own country. Soon his mighty empire began to fall to pieces. At first, disturbances and revolts started in Italy and in the German State itself. Then they spread to the north and south-east. Under these circumstances, it did not take long for Boleslaw to start his own rebellious adventures.

In the year 1003, he invaded Prague, the Bohemian capital, and announced himself Prince of Bohemia. Meanwhile the newly crowned Emperor Henry, resolving to restore the Holy German State, went to the aid of the Bohemians. At the same time, Emperor Henry, who was later to be called Saint, incited the Ruthenians on the east to fight against Boleslaw.

Boleslaw crossed the Oder River and attacked Henry's empire. There followed a long and ravaging war, which continued for thirteen years. The devastated villages and towns were strewn with dead bodies. Toward the end of the year 1018, in



POLAND

UNDER
BOLESŁAW
THE BRAVE
1025

This is taken from an old map showing the position of Poland in the time of Boleslaw the Brave. Many names are in Polish because political divisions as we know them today did not then exist.

the town of Budziszyn, the two rulers entered into a peace agreement in which Boleslaw gave up Bohemia. This defeat crushed the Polish King's dream of creating a federation of Slavs which might push the Germans once and for all back west beyond the Elbe River. In the East, in his battle with the Ruthenians, who were the ancestors of the Ukrainians of to-day, Boleslaw was victorious. He destroyed their whole rich country, murdering and burning whoever or whatever stood in his way. The capital of the country, Kiev, was stripped bare and burned. The Polish King carried off with him many slaves, gold, bolts of rich fabrics, arms, and other valuables.

Just before his death, Prince Boleslaw accomplished another daring act. Since the Pope refused to bestow his blessing upon the ruthless and warlike prince, and would not permit the Polish archbishop to crown him king, Boleslaw took the matter in his own hands and arranged the complete ceremony himself. In the summer of 1024 he ordered all the bishops and prominent knights to be present at the archbishopric in the city of Gniezno. At his own expense, he arranged a big church ceremony in the course of which he forced the archbishop of the Gniezno Cathedral to crown him king. Later, as was expected, the wise Pope recognized this coronation, as did the German Emperor and all the smaller rulers of Europe.

But King Boleslaw Piast did not rejoice long over his battle successes or enjoy for any great time his hard-won crown, for in the year 1025 he passed away. He was buried with great pomp, and was laid to rest next to his father in the Gniezno Cathedral. Over their graves two monuments were later placed; that of the father is arrayed in a long, solemn civilian dress, while that of the son is dressed in armor.

For his many massacres, conquests, and his dictatorial rule, King Boleslaw Piast received the romantic surname *Chrobry*, which means valiant and brave, but for him it meant rebellious and defiant.



CHAPTER 9

Years of Trouble

IN THE NEWLY formed country of Poland, which Boleslaw the Brave had created by force and violence, affairs did not go too smoothly. The quarter of a million souls who made up the nation were sorely oppressed and burdened with high taxes, which had to be paid in natural resources, such as grains and livestock and in forced slave labor for the many dignitaries. The clergy, who were mostly Bohemians and Germans, tyrannized over the people as they pleased, compelling them to contribute heavily to the support of the churches. Those who did not observe the days of fast had their front teeth knocked out, a popular punishment of those times.

King Boleslaw's two sons divided the country between them, but they quarreled constantly, running with their complaints to the German Emperor and asking for his help. Although the oldest son, Mieczyslaw, had had himself crowned king, he did not keep his power long. Besides the unrest continually fomented by internal enemies, like the king's brother and uncle and other ambitious leaders, his country was constantly attacked by the Prussians, Bohemians, Hungarians, Germans, and Ruthenians. King Mieczyslaw defended his domain for a long time, but in the end he was defeated and captured by the Bohemians. He was tortured and forced to swear allegiance to the German Emperor, and compelled to divide his country between his brother and uncle.



THE castle of Niedzica, built in the early fourteenth century, is typical of the fortresses of that period.

Meanwhile the people inside the country revolted and began to burn the churches and castles in revenge for the oppression and exploitation they suffered. In those times the powerful knights, in partnership with the clergy, were the only owners of land, and all the other wealth of the country was in their hands, also. The simple, enslaved people were forced to work for this privileged class and besides that, the poor serfs were compelled to make contributions to the church all the year round. With the riots and the burning of the Christian churches, the peasants seemed to want to return to their pagan ways of worship. They remembered that the god Swiatowid, and the other pagan gods, had never made the unreasonable demands the priests and monks were making. The pagan gods asked only for sacrifices four times a year, and then only for trifles—a pot of honey or some livestock. And, so they argued, the god Swiatowid kept his holy group well disciplined and did not permit his people to suffer under burdensome taxes or through the necessity of observing fast days.

Order was restored in the State by King Mieczyslaw's oldest son, Kazimierz, known as the Restorer, who ruled from 1038 to 1058. Raised by his mother and the German monks, he came to understand the psychology of the Emperor and knew just when and how to approach him. He even managed to obtain military assistance from his illustrious neighbor on the west for the purpose of restoring order in Poland. By promising to pay taxes for Slask, King Kazimierz came to an agreement with the Bohemians, and it was not long before he had also reached an understanding with the Ruthenians.

Following the custom of his grandfather, Boleslaw the Brave, the king next cleaned up his country with an iron broom. He was the first to establish the right of succession to the Polish throne by stipulating that, after his death, his dominions were to be divided among his four sons. The sons were to have the titles of princes and each was to govern only in affairs pertain-

ing to his own territory, while the oldest son, bearing the title of king, was to rule over the whole country. This conception of seniority, emanating from old Slavic custom, officially established the dynasty of kings of the Piast family. But, although King Kazimierz had the courage and strength to restore order in his own kingdom, he was still vassal to the German Emperor and had to pay heavy taxes to him.

When Kazimierz's son, Boleslaw the Bold, came to power, his great ambition was to free himself and his country from the humiliating subservience to Emperor Henry the Fourth. Pope Gregory the Seventh came to his assistance readily enough, because he was equally anxious to see the end of German power and had only been waiting for some such opposition from one of the Emperor's vassals. The Pope sent Boleslaw a splendid golden crown. So it was with a feeling of strength and boldness that the Polish King began his attack on the powerful Emperor. It was a long war, continuing until the end of Boleslaw's reign in the year 1079. The Bohemians, at the instigation of the German ruler, fought against the Polish people and even King Boleslaw's own brother conspired against him.

Because the Bishop had excommunicated King Boleslaw from the church, claiming he led an immoral life, the King took revenge on the churchman by accusing him of conspiring with the Bohemians against Poland. The King's court found the dignitary from Szczepanow guilty and sentenced him to die by having his head cut off with the sword. This verdict was carried out in the Krakow church. But in the end Boleslaw the Bold could not defeat his internal enemies, under the leadership of his brother, Wladyslaw Herman, and he finally had to escape to Hungary, where he died in a Benedictine monastery.

Wladyslaw Herman was the next to occupy the Polish throne. He proved to be a weak and indolent king. He moved his capital from Krakow to Poznan and then later to Plock, where he lived high on a hill in a large and splendid castle. During

his reign the country was overrun with corruption and theft, and lorded over by the priests, who together with other selfish and ambitious church dignitaries milked the country dry.



CHAPTER 10

From Greatness to Disaster

KING WLADYSLAW HERMAN'S son, known as Boleslaw the Wrymouth, was the next to occupy the position of Piast of old and rule the Polish kingdom. Little by little under his sovereignty the internal and external affairs of the country improved, for this Boleslaw was a stouthearted, valiant knight. One of the first things he did after he came into power was openly to oppose the German Emperor, Henry the Fifth, who still required the payment of exceedingly high taxes. The Emperor also insisted that Polish knights should serve in the army which he maintained to insure German supremacy in Europe. Boleslaw, disgusted and angry over these demands, sent to the Emperor a letter which the chronicler Gallus quotes thus:

"You ask for such payments as money, together with Polish knights. We should be women instead of men if we did not defend our rights and freedom against such tyranny. If your manner were less threatening and you asked us more gently for money and soldiers to help the Roman Church, perhaps then you might receive friendship and aid as your forefathers did from our ancestors. Do you know whom you are threatening? If you are looking for war—you will find it!"

Immediately upon the receipt of this arrogant letter, Henry the Fifth attacked Boleslaw the Wrymouth's kingdom. Crossing the Oder River, he besieged the fortress of Glogow. The battle was a terrible one. Polish knights, valiantly defending

the fortress with their bows and arrows, threw great torches of burning wood down on their assailants. The armor of the German knights burst from the heat. The planks of wood with which they were trying to knock down the door of the stronghold and the hurried bridges with which they were trying to span the moat were aflame. Meanwhile King Boleslaw and some of his knights managed to set upon the Germans from the rear and to carry out a wholesale slaughter. Panic prevailed. The Emperor had to escape from Glogow with a loss of about two-thirds of his army. Boleslaw the Wrymouth captured his own brother, Zbigniew, who had joined with the German Emperor in attacking the rightful Polish king in the hope of becoming ruler of Poland. The traitor Zbigniew was imprisoned for life.

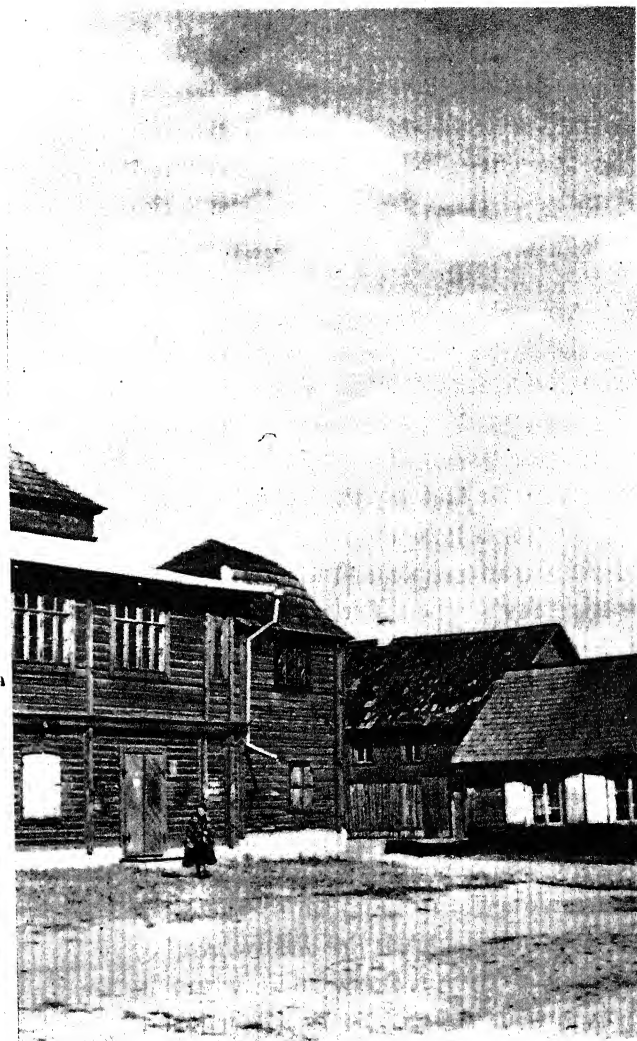
In the year 1119 the Wrymouth controlled all of Pomorze and the territory beyond the Oder River, together with the island of Rugen. On his deathbed he made a will in which he stated that his oldest son was to be the only one to rule the country. The will was confirmed by the Pope and the Emperor in 1138. In spite of the many wars, the country had progressed and developed during Boleslaw's reign. He was credited with the building of many strong new fortresses, clearing miles of forests, and cultivating the land. He held a conference with the bishops, after which the priests and monks were instructed to teach the peasants agriculture and trade and to let politics alone.

The reign of Boleslaw the Wrymouth came to an end with his death in 1138. During the years in which his successors occupied the Polish throne, the country expanded, and with it grew the power of the Polish landowners and princes. Under their domination the peasants were enslaved and, together with the prisoners of war and even the privileged German colonists, they were forced to work for the powerful nobles.

On the other hand, during this time and especially in the

thirteenth century, many Jews, who had been persecuted for their religion in the western parts of Europe, came to make their homes in Poland, where greater tolerance in these matters prevailed. The sober-thinking Polish politicians of those times found these Jewish immigrants very convenient to have around, because they were firmly anti-German. They were not the first Jews to come to Poland. Thousands had come from Asia Minor many years earlier to settle in the land of the Piasts. But, in contrast to the Asiatic Jews, those who had fled from religious persecution in France and Germany were educated and possessed capital with which to engage in commerce—attributes which were of great benefit to the country at that time. Realizing what these newcomers could contribute to the vitally important matter of trade expansion, the Polish princes treated the Jews with unusual kindness and allowed them many privileges. One of these acts of special consideration, called *Kaliski* statute, was established in the year 1264 and was quite liberal in its provisions—liberal, that is, for the thirteenth century. *Kaliski* statute took under its protection the Jewish populace and stipulated that no one should be permitted to insult or abuse them or their synagogues, cemeteries, or religious observances. So the Jews settled in Poland and began to carry on trade with the people of the cities of their new country as well as with the merchants from abroad. They learned to speak the Polish language well, appeared at the courts of the princes, and soon became advisors to these noblemen.

The freedom that they enjoyed in those days distinguished them from the German settlers in the respect that they became good citizens, and the only difference between them and the Polish citizens of the country was their religious practices. The German settlers who had migrated to Poland at the request of the church dignitaries during these hundred years were politically and socially separated from the Poles and Jews, and were a negative element in the country. Always in Po-



IN the city of Grodno is one of the oldest Jewish synagogues. The building, of sturdy oak, shows excellent craftsmanship.

land's most critical times they allied themselves with her enemies. The most tragic example of their treachery occurred during the reign of another Piast, Wladyslaw the Dwarf. It was through these Germans in Poland and their evil plotting that he had so much trouble and such a hard struggle to keep Poland united.

When Margrave Waldemar of Brandenburg, conspiring with the German colonists in the Polish cities in the west and north, invaded Pomorze and captured it, King Wladyslaw found it necessary to ally himself with the Teutonic Crusaders in hopes of driving the German enemy from Polish soil.

The Teutonic Crusaders were paid knights who had been brought from Germany to North Poland in 1228 for the purpose of converting all the pagan people in the area near the Baltic Sea to the Christian faith. These Crusaders were German fighting monks who were to defend Christ's tomb in Jerusalem against the Turks and were to spread the Christian religion everywhere with their swords. They wore black crosses on white cloaks and derived their name from this costume.

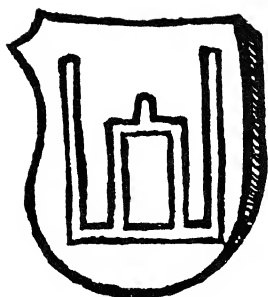
After many years on Polish soil, they accomplished their job all too well. They not only drove Margrave Waldemar's army away, but began to massacre all the Slavs living near the Baltic Sea. They took possession of the city of Gdansk, burned it completely, and murdered its people. With fire and sword they destroyed the entire northern part of Poland and when, in 1309, the whole area was in their power, they established their own capital in Malborg and, under the protection of the German Emperor, took the reins of government into their own hands. Thus Poland was cut off from the Baltic Sea.

Continuing their conquests the German crusaders moved closer and closer to central Poland, until in 1331, King Wladyslaw the Dwarf turned against them. A great battle took place in the village of Plowce, where the Teutonic Crusaders suffered a crushing defeat. But unfortunately the King was not

able to gain any great advantage for his country from his splendid military victory, because within two short years he was dead.

Poland was soon ravaged on all sides. In the southwest, the Bohemians invaded Slask and its adjoining areas and forced the Poles to pay a heavy war levy. While this was happening, the brutal Crusaders in the north were slaughtering the remaining Slavs. All that was left of the once great and powerful nation was the central part of the state.

Exhausted by continual warfare, the nation needed peace to rebuild its cities and villages which had for so long resounded with the violence and tumult of war. Freedom from civil strife and from war was now imperative for the princes so that they might recover from their wounds, and peace was necessary for the enslaved peasants, also, so that they might straighten their bent and aching backs.



CHAPTER 11

Kazimierz, the Builder

KING KAZIMIERZ, last of the Piast dynasty, was industrious in rebuilding his country, which had been devastated by incessant warfare. Historians say, "He acquired a Poland built of wood and left one built of stone."

During his reign, which began in 1333, Poland had two enemies who continually threatened her independence—the Bohemians on the southwest and the Teutonic Crusaders on the north. Kazimierz, aware of the widespread ruin, the exploitation and disease rampant throughout his kingdom, decided to come to peaceful terms with his aggressive neighbors, if possible, so that he could begin to rebuild the fortresses, cities, and the economic life of his nation.

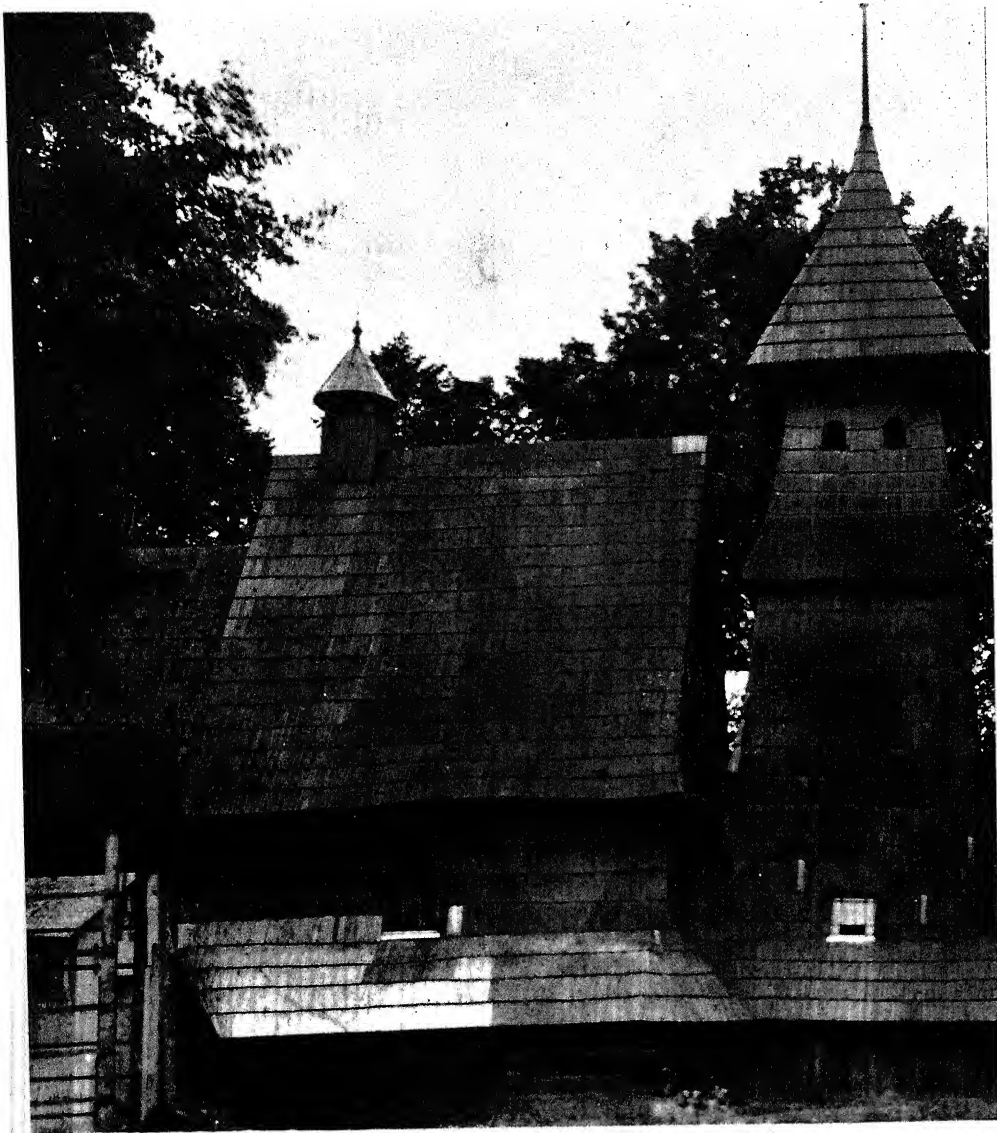
To placate the Bohemian king, he relinquished his claim to the principality of Slask. Although the powerful Teutonic Crusaders were coming closer and closer to central Poland, cutting her completely off from the Baltic Sea, the King resolved not to antagonize them or interfere with them in any way. Despite his reluctance, Kazimierz had no choice but to permit the Crusaders to rule with their bloody swords over the provinces of Pomorze and Kujawy which had formerly belonged to Poland. This was the price he had to pay for peace and the opportunity to rebuild the remaining parts of his country.

While these matters were being settled in this way for the time being, the internal affairs of the country were not going

too well for the peasants. Very often the monks and the noblemen demanded from these poor people higher taxes in work and natural resources than their contracts stipulated. No one arose to defend the peasants nor to fight on their behalf for a minimum wage on which they could sustain life at a level of more than mere existence. Their only salvation was to try to escape from their serfdom, but many times, as they made these attempts, they were killed by the avaricious landowners.

King Kazimierz himself saw all that was going on around him because, as stories tell us, he disguised himself as a peasant and wandered over the country observing conditions at first hand. Because of this custom he became known as the King of Peasants. The fruits of his observations were embodied in a code of laws, called the Statute of Wislica, which was proclaimed in 1347. These laws, set down in black and white, applied to all sections of Poland. According to these statutes, only two peasant families a year were allowed to leave a nobleman's or a monastery's lands voluntarily. In the event that a nobleman was excommunicated from the church for immoral reasons, all the peasants were permitted to leave his lands and to seek other quarters. They were also free to move if a landowner wronged a peasant's wife or daughter. These were the only favorable laws for the peasant. He was still bound to one place, and had to work for miserable pay consisting of a small quantity of grain and livestock. The Statute of Wislica was only a set of laws regulating slavery for the whole country—a slavery that prevailed over all of Europe.

In the year 1356 in the castle at Krakow, Kazimierz established a law in regard to the townsmen. From the time of the German colonization, the residents of towns and cities had had their own separate autonomy, disregarding the Polish administration, whenever it was not satisfactory to them, by appealing to the courts of the German cities from which they had come. With the exception of the Jews, the men of the



ANCIENT wooden church in southwestern Poland. The altar and figures of Christ and the Virgin are also carved in wood. Rugs with Bible motifs, woven by the peasants, add color to the interior.

towns, who were occupied with commerce and industry, were descendants of the German colonists who had been allowed to govern themselves under the old German city laws. Previous Polish kings had permitted this system to continue through the years. But now the new laws promulgated by Kazimierz put an end to this procedure. From then on the townsmen knew that any disputes which arose would have to be settled not by the foreign courts but by the courts of the Polish king.

In this era, learning in Poland was concentrated only in the monasteries and churches. If a wealthy nobleman wanted his son to attend a higher school such as a university, he had to send him abroad. Although the first monastery schools had been established in Poland in the eleventh century, there was not one university in the whole country. It was not until the year 1364 that the first university was opened in Krakow by Kazimierz, who bestowed special privileges of self-government on the professors and students, thereby attracting many prominent professors and students from abroad.

During his reign this King, with his flair for administration, extended his protection over many Ruthenian cities, such as Lwow, Halicz, Przemyśl, and Włodzimierz. In accomplishing this easy occupation of Ruthenia, he was given full co-operation by the Ruthenian princes, who sought the aid and protection of the Polish king in order to free themselves from the continuous aggressive attacks of the Tartars. Kazimierz, taking advantage of the weakness of the Ruthenian princes, began to colonize their lands by sending Polish farmers, merchants, and princes into the heart of the country. He arranged the Polish infiltration into Lwow with particular care, because that city was a trade center between the rich Near East and the west. In Lwow, he laid the foundation of the Latin Cathedral and several other public structures, for building was a special passion of this King. In Krakow, the capital city of his own country, he built a new castle on Wawel hill, and, in

the market place, a magnificent edifice, called *Sukiennice* (building for selling woolen cloth), which he had especially constructed for the merchants. And throughout the country he established schools, monasteries, and stone churches.

During the years of his rule not only building and learning developed, but trade and industry flourished. Next to agriculture, Kazimierz paid special attention to the industry of the country, which consisted mostly of handicraft work. In every city all streets led to the market place in the center of which stood a municipal building which was the meeting ground for all tradesmen. Artisans of different trades lived on different streets. For instance, one street was occupied by carpenters, another by shoemakers, another by furriers, one farther on by armorers, and so on, down the line.

Every occupation had its guild organization. Each worker had to belong to his respective guild and to attend meetings at which officers were nominated and trade matters discussed. The officers of the guilds determined the price of the merchandise, the quality and amount to be made, and settled any matters that came up between the masters and apprentices. Naturally the heads of the guilds were the masters who made all the regulations concerning the apprentices. Many times disagreements arose between the masters and the apprentices, and the latter always seemed to be the losers. Mutiny, or strikes as we call them today, initiated by the apprentices, were usually punished by fines, whippings, or sometimes even by death. The guild organizations were the mainspring in the development of handicraft work which was the base of the commerce of that time.

Because of the constructive work he did for his country, King Kazimierz was not only known as the "King of Peasants" but also as "The Great" and "The Just." On his death in 1370, he bequeathed the Polish throne to his nephew, the King of Hungary.



CHAPTER 12

First Rulers of the Jagiello Dynasty

IT WAS NATURAL that when a king of Hungary occupied the Polish throne he should want to make Poland a part of the Hungarian kingdom. His political strategy, therefore, was to weaken Poland as quickly as possible. In spite of his promise to preserve and continue all Polish laws, the influential Polish nobles disliked him and did everything in their power to remove him from the throne. It is true that practically all of Ludwig's time was spent in Hungary, and only once in a great while did he visit the Polish capital of Krakow. His political strategy was to weaken Poland as quickly as possible so that he could the more easily make it a part of the Hungarian kingdom.

During his reign, Red Ruthenia succeeded in separating herself from Poland and soon princes from other parts of the country began to lift up their voices and clamor to become independent of Krakow. Many of these ambitious princes wanted to crown themselves king. One of the most pretentious was Ziemowit, who started a civil war in the course of which King Ludwig was killed.

Since this Hungarian King of Poland had no male heirs, the Polish nobles chose his youngest daughter Jadwiga as the Queen. But before she was allowed to rule the Polish State she had to divorce her German husband, Prince Wilhelm. At first the powerful nobles wanted her to marry the important Prince

Ziemowit, but another plan was put forward by the Lithuanian noblemen, who suggested that she marry Prince Jagiello of Lithuania. This move would be most convenient for the Lithuanian oligarchy because, united with the strong Poles, they could rid themselves of the ruthless German Crusaders who ruled Prussia, and from there continually plundered Lithuania under the pretense that they were converting the country to the Christian faith.

In February of the year 1386 the Lithuanian Prince Jagiello accepted Christianity from the Poles, took the first name of Wladyslaw, and married Queen Jadwiga, who was then in her early twenties. This political marriage united the two countries, and Lithuania, accepting Christianity and receiving military support from Poland, could boldly oppose the German Knights. Both sides had made preparations for this conflict for a long time. The Knights had signed a pact of military assistance with Sigmund of Luxembourg, ruler of Hungary and Brandenburg, and with the Prince of Stettin. Poland and Lithuania secured a promise of aid from Bohemia and negotiated a pact with the Tartars, who had overrun a good part of Europe and who agreed they would not attack Poland while she fought with the Crusaders.

The preparations made against the Crusaders on the north progressed successfully, and in the next year Queen Jadwiga and her husband, Wladyslaw Jagiello, seized Red Ruthenia from the Hungarians, who at that moment were engaged in a domestic uprising. With the annexation of Red Ruthenia and later the occupation of the neighboring provinces of Moldavia, Bessarabia, and others which were economically allied with Ruthenia, King Jagiello opened a road to the Black Sea for Poland.

Wladyslaw Jagiello became a powerful ruler greatly admired by the Polish nobles. They had good reason for this approbation because they prospered mightily during his reign, extend-



A RARE woodcut from
*Commune Incliti Regni Poloniae
 Privilegium* (1506) representing
 King Aleksander (1461–1506)
 and his parliament in Lublin city.

The symbols of the princes and provinces of Poland are used as decorative chapter heads in this book, as they are in the old one.

ing their influence over all of Poland, Lithuania, Red Ruthenia, and to the Black Sea, where they established commercial contacts with Greece and Asia Minor. In the sale of grains, horses, cattle, textiles, and iron in their own cities and abroad, the nobles received their profits indirectly. They dearly loved money but regarded themselves as too high-born to deal in trade, so they hired merchants who acted as their intermediaries. These merchants, often working on a percentage basis, were mostly Jews and Germans who very skillfully managed all the details of selling the products from the estates of the rich and titled gentry in the Polish cities and abroad. The greatest part of the profits went into the pockets of the powerful aristocrats in silver coins, the true value of which they had learned only a short time before.

The first coins used in the country were made of iron and stamped by King Boleslaw the Brave of the Piast dynasty. Later they were manufactured by the princes and bishops. Practically every principality had its own coinage until the year 1347. Then King Kazimierz the Great introduced a uniform coin made of silver which was to be used throughout the whole country. This was known as the *grzywna*, which means tax or fine in the Polish language of today.

So in the course of the reign of Wladyslaw Jagiello the wealthy noblemen prospered, with ever greater possibilities for amassing thousands of *grzywnas*, not only through placing higher taxes on the land leased out to the minor noblemen and peasants, but also by selling the produce of their lands and receiving the profits from their factories. Besides the home markets, Polish wheat, woolen materials, arms, and salt were sold in Lithuania, Red Ruthenia, Moldavia, Bessarabia, Bulgaria, and the Asiatic countries. The princes and counts established contacts through enterprising Polish merchants who acted as envoys to the Bohemians, Hungarians, Tartars, Russians, and Germans. These men who dealt in trade soon be-

came a strong separate class with great economical power which began to threaten the power of the nobles.

Along with her growth in commercial importance, Poland, in the period of Wladyslaw Jagiello's reign, grew both politically and in military power, until she had become the first ruling power in Europe. On the fifteenth of July in 1410 the King, at the head of the combined Polish, Lithuanian, Ruthenian, and Bohemian armies, defeated the powerful German Crusaders near Grunwald. In this battle in which over one hundred and fifty thousand armored knights fought on both sides, the German leader, Ulrych von Jungingen, was lost, and with him the flower of German knighthood. But for a narrow escape, the Polish King would have met the same fate. Here is an interesting description of the scene told by Jan Dlugosz, a Polish historian, who heard the story about the fierce battle of Grunwald from his father.

"Impelled by a burning desire to fight and impatient to get into the thickest part of the battle, the warrior King Wladyslaw spurred on his horse. His side guards riding near him did all in their power to slow him down. Suddenly a German knight, Dypold Kikeryc, from the Prussian camp, appeared on the scene wearing a golden girdle and white robe of German style, which we would call a blouse or jacket, under a protecting coat of armor. He rode forward on a dun-colored horse waving his spear threateningly and heading directly toward the King. Just as King Wladyslaw lifted his lance in readiness for the attack, Zbigniew from Olesnica, the king's secretary, who was not even wearing armor, reached the attacker and speared him from the back. This sudden and unexpected assault threw the attacker from his horse to the ground."

J. Dlugosz says further that the Poles captured fifty-one German flags and "discovered in the Crusaders' camps many wagons loaded with iron chains with which the Germans had planned to shackle the Poles, so certain were they of victory."

What a proof of the prudence and foresight of the systematic Germans who, even before achieving any victory, had already planned how to confine their prisoners! The Polish triumph over the Crusaders taught the German knights and leaders that the Slavic nations were strong and capable of uniting in time of danger.

For Wladyslaw, the defeat of the Teutonic Crusaders held important personal significance. In the year 1400 when his wife Jadwiga was dying, he had promised her he would do everything in his power to break the powerful Germans, and he had now kept his word. When Wladyslaw died thirty-four years after Jadwiga, he left his country great and powerful.

The next important king in the Jagiello line was Kazimierz. In 1454 he married the Austrian archduchess Elizabeth of Hapsburg. While he reigned, Poland extended from the Baltic to the Black Seas. The country began to absorb from Western Europe a culture known as Humanism. The name came from the Latin words *humana studia*—study of human affairs. It was a great attempt of science, literature, and other arts to free themselves from church influence, under which branches of human knowledge were only a servant to holy theology. Whatever did not agree with the teachings and writings of the church was branded as evil. The Roman Catholic Church opposed humanism from the moment of its birth in Italy. But the church, try as it would, could not crush this movement, which the French called the Renaissance, for by the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, it had grown and spread all over Europe and soon reached Poland.

In Poland, under the influence of humanism, a new kind of teaching arose—a teaching no longer based on ancient ecclesiastical beliefs but on mental calculation and faith in man. One of the leaders in this new way of thinking was the ingenious astronomer Mikolaj Kopernik, known to the world by



Woodcut of Copernicus, the great astronomer.

his Latin name Copernicus. He was the first to prove in his monumental book, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium*, that the earth revolved on its axis and at the same time around the sun. He proved that the planetary center of our universe is not the earth but the sun. In the University of Krakow science developed rapidly. Evidence of this quick growth is the fact that there were *forty* professors teaching philosophy on one faculty. Andrzej Galka, a follower of the Bohemian religious reformer, Jan Hus, was one of the great Polish humanists. Hus had organized the Bohemian progressive church which was independent of Rome and opposed all papal influence. Galka helped spread the new religious ideas throughout Poland.

In Poland during the period of the Renaissance, scientists and writers gradually abandoned the use of Latin and began to write in the Polish language. The King's lawyers advised him that, in order to become stronger and more powerful, he must renounce the influence of the Roman Church. In the year 1474 the first Polish printing house was established in Krakow. Non-ecclesiastical schools, breaking away completely from church control, were founded.

Everyday life went through a change also. The women in the cities no longer covered their faces. They began to wear clothes imported from Italy. They attended public gatherings. Dinners were elaborate functions of many courses during which festive wines were served.

The force of this new way of life spread out from the cities and penetrated even into the homes of the lesser noblemen who began to come under the influence of the new customs. All this grandeur was naturally very costly for the noblemen, who spent lavish quantities of money on clothes and banquets. They soon found it necessary to oppress their subjects more by demanding higher rents for the leased lands, and they urged the King to compel the townsmen to sell their goods imported

from Greece, Asia Minor, and Italy, at cheaper rates. Through the King, the noblemen tried to control the merchants who were making excellent profits in business.

In the last ten years of the fifteenth century, as the strength of the nobles grew, they tried to introduce laws into the Polish parliament, known as the *Sejm*, that were most advantageous for their own well-being. Through the King's willingness to agree to the many proposals made by the noblemen, because he in turn needed money and political support from them, the noblemen soon became all-powerful in the land. Possessing uncontrolled authority, they were able to pass laws and so conduct the government that not only the peasants but also the townsmen, engaged in the development of their fast-growing businesses, were bent to the will of the nobles—and these conditions have prevailed even up to modern times.



CHAPTER 13

The Growth of a New Life

DURING THE REIGN of Zygmunt the Old, who came into possession of the Polish throne in 1506, the matter of Poland versus the Teutonic Crusaders was settled for a long time to come. The leader of the Crusaders, Albrecht, who was later given the title of Prince, was forced to accept Polish protection and to pay high for the privilege. The ceremony took place on the eighth of April in 1525 in the Krakow public square. Albrecht knelt down in front of the Polish King and publicly promised obedience and acknowledged the Polish victory over himself and his country.

The Teutonic Crusaders underwent a change too. They renounced the supremacy of the Pope and accepted the religious principles of the German, Martin Luther, who in 1517 was campaigning for a national church in Germany.

Through this triumphant victory over Prussia and Prince Albrecht, Poland gained wider access to the Baltic Sea. This opening to western and northern Europe by way of the sea made it easier for the Polish nobles and the merchants to avail themselves of greater opportunities for doing business. Barges of goods and wares floated down the river Wisla all the way from Krakow to the Baltic ports. From there by way of boats the merchandise was taken to Germany, France, Spain, and other countries. The power of the nobles grew ever greater economically and politically until it threatened even the king.

The impositions on the peasant became so excessive that he had to work two days a week for nothing, with only the five remaining days in which he could work for his own upkeep. In addition to this taxes were very high.

With the growth of the trade with southern and western Europe, ideas of Calvinism, Hussitism, and Lutherism crept into Poland. All three were the enemies of the Catholic Church. At this time, the Polish ecclesiastics were corrupt, caring only for their own personal profits, interested only in scrambling to attain higher positions. One of them, Bishop Zebrzydowski of Krakow even remarked. "Believe in a goat if you like, so long as you pay your tithe."

But when these various new religions began to confiscate church estates and to undermine their spheres of influence, the matter became a little too much for the Roman bishops. They turned frantically to King Zygmunt the Old for aid in combating this heresy. The King issued a series of sharp edicts against the religious conflicts. But the decrees were of little avail, for the people were tired of seeing the wealth of the monasteries and bishoprics. They knew that the true teachings of Christ were of poverty and sacrifice, which had little to do with the corrupt ways of the priests of that time and the luxury of their wealthy homes.

In the second part of the sixteenth century there began a new Polish reformation period which was started by Piotr from Goniadz. According to Piotr's teaching there was one God but no Holy Trinity. Jesus Christ was not the eternal Son of God but a human being who was divinely inspired by God. His whole religion was founded on love and fellowship in everyday life, and of course this teaching was most appealing to the poverty-stricken peasant. The Arians, as the followers of Piotr from Goniadz were called, condemned all kinds of violence and coercion, not only that of the noblemen toward the peasant but also that of the church and royal administra-

tors toward the working people. In the town of Rakow, the Arians established printing houses and schools, and through these channels, with the aid of brochures, papers, and books, they penetrated the whole country with their teachings. The language used in print and from their pulpits was Polish, and not the Latin which was used in the Roman Catholic churches.

The first Polish language in print appeared in a few books on religious topics, published by Bernard from Lublin in 1515. Following this, many other authors wrote in Polish, but their books were all translations from the Latin. The first author to publish a book written originally in the Polish language was the brilliant writer and follower of Calvinism, Mikolaj Rej, who wrote *Conversation between a Nobleman, Peasant, and Curate*, which appeared in 1543. He made the statement, "Let everyone know that Poles are not geese and have a language of their own."

Other writers came after Mikolaj Rej, the most outstanding of whom were the historian Marcin Bielski and the publicist Lukasz Gornicki.

Centuries later one of the outstanding Polish historians, Michal Bobrzynski, wrote the following paragraph about those times:

"The bloody sweat of the Polish peasantry was poured forth profusely to enlarge the estates of the Polish landowners, to increase their profits, and to build magnificent manor houses. Alongside the princes, other groups of rich noblemen gained prominence. Now freed from their financial worries, they were able to give full rein to their ambitions and to further their education."

From the enormous profits derived from their estates and their businesses, the wealthier groups of nobles and merchants were now able to send their children not only to Krakow University but to study in Italy and France. Throughout the whole countryside magnificent castles, churches, and public

buildings were newly erected. The younger generation, returning home from abroad, brought with them ways of thinking which found a good place to flourish in the hungry minds of the wealthy aristocrats who lived on the misfortune and slavery of the Polish peasants and city workers.

Throughout practically the whole of the sixteenth century and during the beginning of the seventeenth century, there came an era which is called the Golden Age of Polish Literature. Standing at the head of the writers of this epoch is the nobleman, Jan Kochanowski, known as the Prince of Polish poets. He wrote in Polish and in Latin, but he achieved his immortality by writing such Polish works as "Satyr"; "Chess," a theatrical play: "Departure of Greek Envoys"; and a collection of mourning verses, "Elegies," written after the death of his daughter Urszula.

In the cities such poets achieved fame as the splendid satirical writer Sebastian Klonowicz, author of "Sack of Judas," the brothers Zimorowicz, and Szymon Szymonowicz, idyllic author who so ably expressed the distress of the village people. These prominent writers and dozens of other historians, poets, publicists, dramatists, were educated in the healthy atmosphere of humanism which pulled Poland out of the fog of the customs of the Middle Ages.



CHAPTER 14

Many Kings and Many Wars

THE NEXT EVENTS in the story of Poland were important and unique.

They involved, among other happenings, the formation of the first single parliament for Poland and Lithuania, and a competition among the crowned heads of Europe for the throne of Poland.

The dynasty of the Jagiellos was coming to an end, for King Zygmunt August had no heirs. He was therefore much concerned over the future of his kingdom, which included Poland and the states under his political control, Bohemia, Ruthenia, Lithuania, Prussia, Samogitia, and Courland. With the idea of working out some sort of settlement concerning the future, he called together the representatives of these countries to meet on the twenty-third of December, 1568, in the city of Lublin. The conference with its lengthy discussions and heated arguments lasted until the twelfth of August of the following year. In the course of the long debates, the first problem to be settled was the relationship of Poland and Lithuania. Each of these two countries was to retain a separate administration and judiciary, but they were to be united under a single parliament, known as the Sejm, composed of three parts: the king, the senate, and the chamber of deputies.

Ruthenia, on the other hand, was to be divided between Poland, which at this time was called the Crown, and Lithu-

ania. The boundary line of the division began at the town of Parczewo in the province of Podlasie, ran through the Pinsk marshes and the Prypec basin to the town of Lubecz on the Dnieper River.

At the conference, a definite settlement was reached in regard to Prussia, Moldavia, and Courland, all of which remained under the loose control of the Crown. Other important matters which were discussed but not definitely settled were internal reforms for the nation and the guarantee of clearer and stronger religious freedom for the members of the Protestant churches. One of the most urgent matters to be brought up at the conference was the question of who was to be the next ruler. In conformity with the laws of that time all offices, from the lowest to the highest, were held in the king's name. The present constitution made no provision for what would happen to the administration if the king should die without leaving an heir. And unfortunately the king died on July 7, 1572, before the matter of his successor had been settled.

The Archbishop of Gniezno became the temporary head of the government, naming himself Interrex. During the period of the interregnum, a new administration and judiciary was formed and the Interrex, together with his advisory magnates, began to look about for a successor to the throne. In April of the next year, forty thousand nobles gathered in the village of Wola, near Warszawa, as they had done in the time of the Princes, to examine the candidates applying for the royal crown. The Tsar of Moscow, Ivan the Terrible, was a candidate; others were the King of Sweden, an Austrian Archduke, and Henry of Valois, the son of the King of France.

After many weeks of excitement and heated argument, the representatives of the nobles agreed to accept Henry of Valois because he was willing to grant them more privileges than any of the others. The son of the French monarch became King of Poland under the following conditions. The king could not

declare war without the approval of the senate. He could not call a general mobilization throughout the whole country without the permission of the Sejm. Sixteen senators had to be constantly with Henry of Valois to see that he made no move against the noblemen. He could only sign bills which did not oppose in any way the privileges and freedom of the nobles, and he had to respect their religious faiths. If the king violated any national law, the country—and here we must understand that this meant the nobles—had the right to renounce obedience to the monarch. Besides this, Henry of Valois promised to pay all the debts of the previous King and to build a navy on the Baltic Sea at his own personal cost. Henry of Valois promised that his brother, who was now King of France, would sign an alliance with Poland and, in time of war, would supply four thousand of the best French infantrymen. With his power thus curtailed by the Polish nobles, Henry of Valois became the first elected King of Poland. His reign had lasted not quite a full year when he found that his brother had died, so he escaped secretly at night and journeyed to Paris to put in his claim for the French throne. Again Poland was left without a king.

The next selection was a happier one—Stefan Batory, a prince of Hungarian descent, who was married to Anna Jagiello, the sister of the deceased king, Zygmunt August. As soon as he was elected, Stefan Batory told the Polish noblemen in a forthright manner, "I do not intend to be a wooden king or a painted one either. You elected me, and now you must listen to me."

The first reform he put into effect was a reorganization of the army, which had been composed exclusively of noblemen and had been called together only in time of approaching war. Stefan Batory formed a permanent paid army, composed of infantrymen, who were peasants forcibly recruited from the royal estates. German and Hungarian infantry soldiers were



THE COAT OF ARMS
OF WARSAW

also hired. The heavy cavalry was made up only of noblemen, who wore suits of armor, the cost of which was defrayed by the national treasury. To the cavalry, the King added light detachments of horses which were ridden by Ukrainian Cossacks. The artillery was composed mostly of professional German soldiers.

In this way the first regular Polish Army, financed by the State treasury, was organized. Stefan Batory and his commander-in-chief, at that time called a *hetman*, Jan Zamojski, made use of the newly organized army in 1579 when they attacked the Tsar of Moscow, Ivan the Terrible. They used an attack made by the Tsar on the provinces near the Baltic, which were under Polish control, as an excuse for this adventurous move.

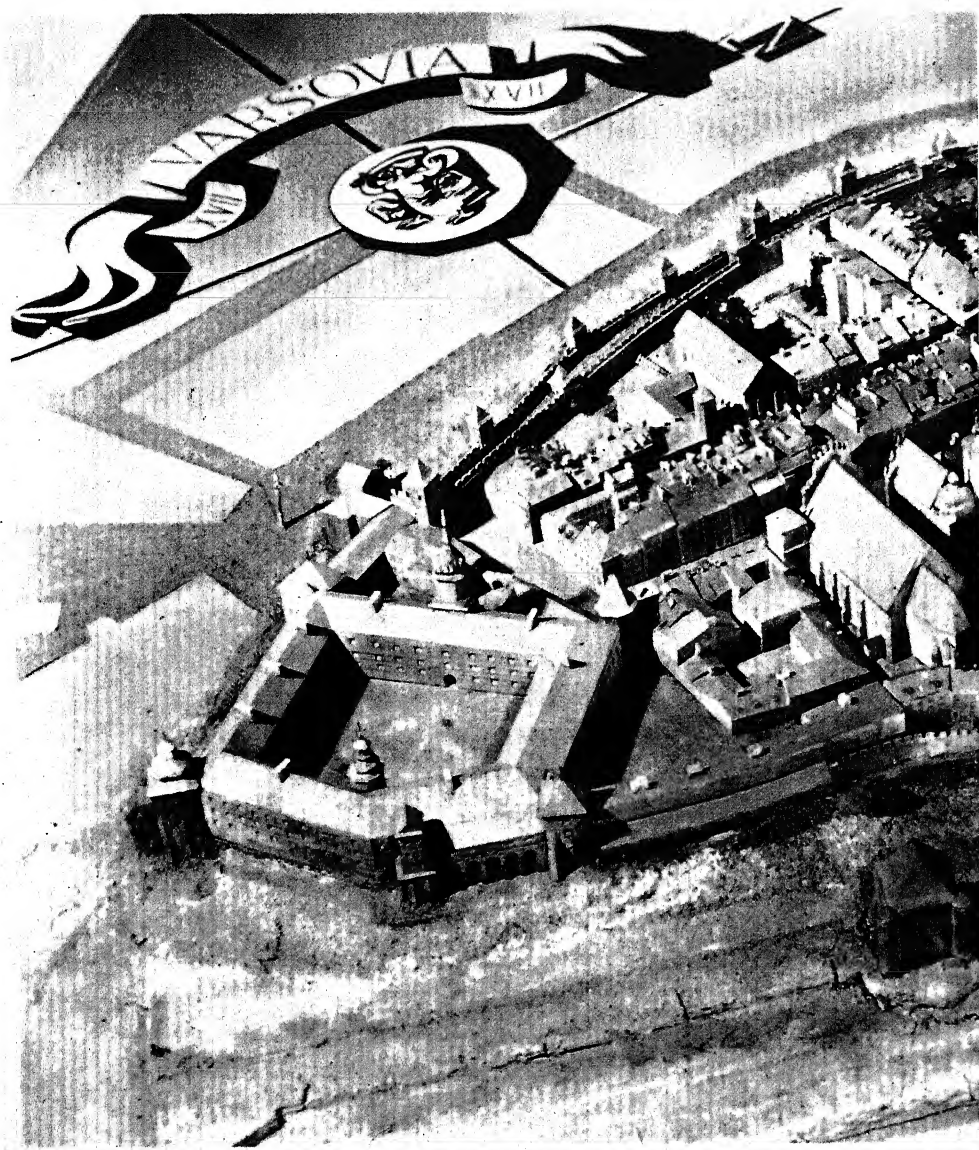
The Polish Army advanced rapidly, vanquishing the forces of Ivan the Terrible. The fortress of Polotsk fell, and Stefan Batory, at the head of his army, moved toward another stronghold, Velikiye Luki. During the siege of this fort, many enslaved Polish peasants, led by Grzegorz Wieloch, distinguished themselves by their bravery. For their gallantry and heroism, Stefan Batory conferred titles of nobility upon Wieloch and his companions. The king's secretary, Heidenstein, relates the incidents of the capture of these forts in his diary, thus giving us a picture of the warfare of the period:

"A volunteer, grabbing a pick, ran out amid a hail of bullets to the side of the wall. Here, where he was safe from cannon fire, he began to dig at the plaster of the wall with his pick. An enemy appeared on the other side and tried to interfere with what he was doing. Meanwhile the nobleman Wybranowski, coming up with a group of sharpshooters from the edge of the river, reached the enemy detachments from the rear. Our men from the ramparts began to shoot at the enemy, who were forced to retreat farther back into the fortress. The next day before dawn, hetman Zamojski had the men dig again

near the fortress and placed guards in special positions to watch and see if any enemy soldier would appear from within the stronghold and try to hinder the work. At the same time, the nobleman, Stanislaw Kostka, managed to get a number of garden implements, covered them with cloth, and poured tar and sulphur around them. They were to serve as torches for a fire. Dawn came up and hetman Zamojski sent other volunteers with picks to the side of the castle wall. Just at this place a window had been completely covered with soil. The men began to dig away the dirt to open a way inside. In a short time the Moscowites on the other side could be plainly seen. They hurled spears and fired at our men with their rifles. Our men likewise replied with fire. When the Moscowites pierced our men with spears, our soldiers grabbed the weapons and turned them back on the foe. Hetman Zamojski, spurring his men on courageously, gave the order to bring more kindling materials. A large fire was soon burning fiercely. The whole wall collapsed. The fire reached a church and from there spread on to other buildings."

The Velikiye Luki stronghold surrendered within a few hours. In a like manner, the King captured the fortress of Pskov and approached the outskirts of Moscow. These victories forced Tsar Ivan the Terrible to sue for peace. A settlement was arranged in 1582. The Tsar lost the Baltic provinces and the principality of Polotsk to Poland.

After arranging matters so successfully with the Russian Tsar, Stefan Batory planned to fight the Turks, who controlled practically all the Balkans. But in the middle of his preparations, King Stefan Batory died, leaving Poland again in confusion over who was to be the successor to the throne. The nobles plunged the country into a domestic conflict over the issue. Soon the Cossacks in Ruthenia, today known as Ukraina, began to revolt. They wanted freedom and did not relish being forced to obey the commands of the Polish nobles.



RECONSTRUCTION of seventeenth-century Warsaw. This city became the capital of Poland late in the sixteenth century.

On top of all this turmoil at home, Zygmunt the Third, who had been elected the next king of Poland, ensnarled the country in a war with Sweden. His father, the King of Sweden, died and Zygmunt sought to rule that country as well as Poland. He was not able to realize this ambition, and for his adventure the Polish State paid heavily.

Zygmunt the Third changed the capital from Krakow to Warszawa. Under the influence of the Jesuits, he declared war on the Russian Tsar in 1609. The Jesuit priest, Piotr Skarga, instigated this declaration of war because his powerful religious order wanted to see the eastern part of Europe under the control of the Roman Catholic Church. The nobles approved the war in the east because they hoped thus to secure rich new lands and more slaves to work for them.

While hetman Chodkiewicz was adjusting political matters in the north with his bloody sword, hetman Stanislaw Zolkiewski advanced on Moscow with the blessings of the Jesuits and the nobles. Zolkiewski and his army penetrated to the city of Smolensk. The frightened Russian nobility, called Boyars, sent envoys with the message that they would seat Wladyslaw, son of Zygmunt the Third, on the throne of Moscow if the fighting ceased. Zygmunt the Third replied by arresting the envoys of the powerful Boyars and sending them to Warszawa as prisoners. Incited by the Jesuits, who cunningly spurred him on, Zygmunt dreamed of capturing all of Russia, converting the country to the Roman Catholic faith, and crowning himself, and not his son, King of Moscow.

As they moved farther toward the east beyond Smolensk, the worn, tired soldiers of the Polish Army began to revolt, breaking ranks in their great desire to return home as quickly as possible to their families and to peace. On the road back they plundered the villages and towns, devastating and burning what they could not carry off. The King, powerless to control his men, had to retreat with them. Meanwhile the

Boyars in Moscow and the prominent clergymen from all over Russia assembled together and appointed Michael Romanoff, a relative of the deceased Ivan the Terrible, to occupy the throne of the Tsar.

The Polish King's son, Wladyslaw, considered himself the rightful Tsar because of the earlier promise of the Boyars. He refused to acknowledge Michael Romanoff as Tsar, and a few years later moved against him. After a long and relentless war, he came to peace terms with the Romanoff in 1618, receiving a large strip of Russian land on the north and southeast. Following this, Poland engaged the Turks and Swedes in a war which ended in a truce, with neither side gaining anything.

Wladyslaw the Fourth acceded to the throne in 1632 and throughout the whole sixteen years of his rule, went from one adventurous war to another. Most of his trouble was caused by the Ukrainian Cossacks who, united under leadership of Bohdan Chmelnicky, were determined to liberate themselves from the control of the Polish noblemen. The Cossacks wanted to rule themselves and they considered that the pillaging of their land, the rich Ukraine, by the Polish nobles would soon bring their country to complete ruin. So the Cossacks joined with the Tartars to attack Poland. King Wladyslaw hastily made for the Ukraine in 1648 to begin discussions with the Cossack representatives. But death interrupted his journey. His successor, Jan Kazimierz, who came to the throne that same year, had to continue the war already started with the Cossacks. They and their allies, the Tartars, assembled an army of nearly four hundred thousand soldiers against the Polish King. Meanwhile the Russian Tsar, allying himself with the Cossacks, occupied part of Lithuania. And in addition to all the other troubles in which Poland was involved, Carl Gustav, King of Sweden, entered the country from the northwest and even occupied the capital of Warszawa.

A relentless war was fought on three fronts and the whole

countryside suffered. It was not until the year 1657 that hetman Czarniecki succeeded in expelling the Swedes from Poland. He pursued them as far as Denmark. With this victory, the Poles were able to turn the whole force of their army against the Cossacks and Russians. Soon they ended this battle successfully, too, by chasing their enemies beyond Polish boundaries.

During this time religious persecution was springing up inside the country. The clever slogan used to arouse the enthusiasm of the populace for these wars was, "We are fighting for our faith and our country," for at that time all the enemies of Poland were non-Catholics. But soon this slogan became warped by the zealous Catholic clergy to such an extent that, in their fanaticism, the enflamed Catholic nobility began to persecute their own countrymen who believed in the Protestant religion.

Crowds of ignorant people, led by the Jesuits, ravaged and destroyed the printing houses, schools, and other cultural buildings of the Protestants. They took special revenge on the Arians. This group, thoroughly terrorized, had to escape beyond the borders of the country or embrace Catholicism, if they wanted to stay healthy.

Those who belonged to this persecuted Arian sect were cultured people who wished only to worship God in their own way. Their main difference from the Catholics was their refusal to recognize the authority of the Pope. Among the Arians of that time were many idealistic thinkers and writers. They were patriotic and liberal-minded, and they respected all people regardless of religion.



This Map shows the Polish Commonwealth prior to 1667. Outlined in heavy black is pre-war Poland of 1939.





CHAPTER 15

Peasants and Landowners

DURING THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY and through the early part of the eighteenth century, Poland was almost exclusively an agricultural country. The noblemen—those owners of huge tracks of cultivated ground—gathered enormous quantities of rye, wheat, barley, and other grains from their lands each year.

Down the smaller rivers, and each day throughout the autumn, floated primitive rafts made of pine logs and piled high with different varieties of grain. On went the rafts to the main rivers—the Oder, Wisla, Niemen—and from there to the ports of Gdansk, Koenigsberg, Stettin. There the grain was loaded on German, English, Dutch, and Spanish boats and transported all over Europe.

A law was passed in 1633 providing that a person living on the estate of a nobleman for a year automatically became the subject of the landowner. This in reality meant that half the peasant's labor had to be given for nothing. From the age of fifteen, later lowered to eight, every peasant from youth to old age had to work for the titled landowners. And when the laborer was no longer useful he was thrown out and had to turn to begging in order to exist.

At this time grains brought in the largest profit. A piece of land known as a *folwark* produced a harvest which yielded 335 *zlotys* yearly. Gardens, orchards, and poultry yielded about

29 zlotys, while the profit from one cow was about 3 zlotys per year. The peasant had to buy his wodka and beer at the nobleman's store at whatever high price he chose to ask. The peasant's grain had to be ground in the nobleman's mill, and even the bleaching of cloth had to be done on his estates, while the tanning of animal skins for shoes had to be taken care of in the nobleman's tannery. The peasant did not own any cattle or horses, but had to rent them from his master and pay a yearly fee for anything he used. The work on the fields or in the nobleman's house began at early dawn and ended late at night. Lateness was punishable by whippings, fines, or by being thrown into iron chains. Each year on St. Martin's day, the nobleman held court in his village and announced new and different rules for the enslaved people. Smaller verdicts as whippings or fines were executed right on the estates, but a sentence of death was carried out in the nearest city. At this time, much the same methods were used and no better conditions prevailed in the villages in Germany and Russia.

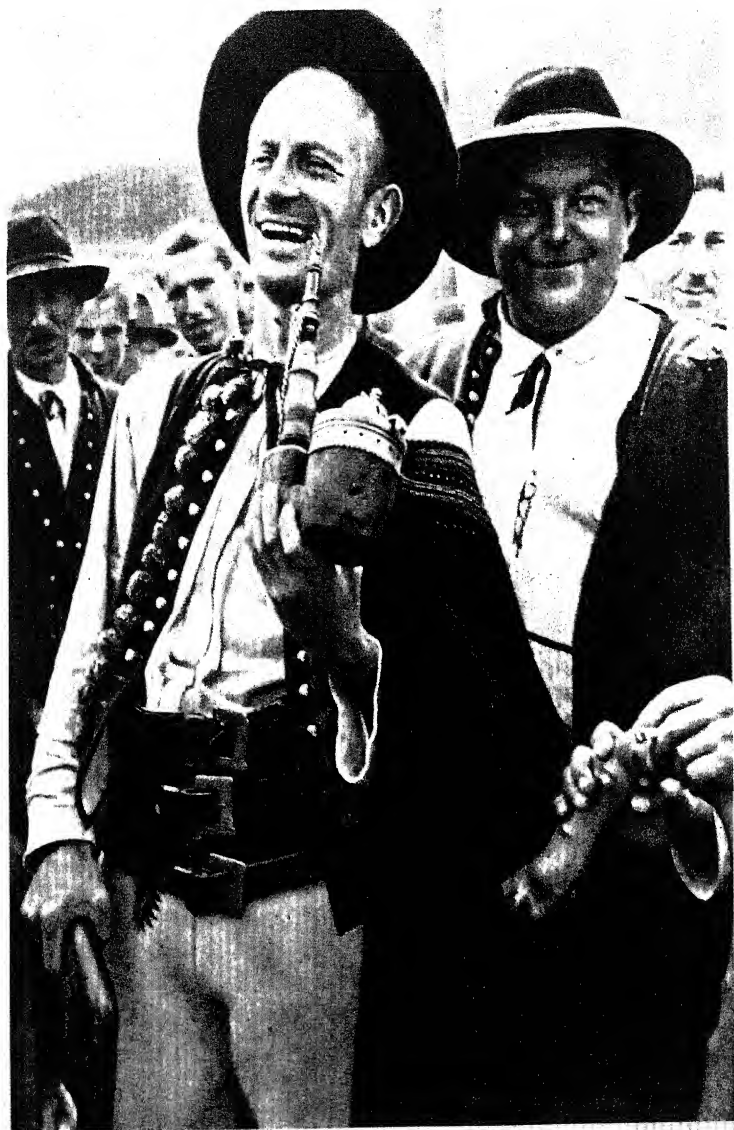
Meanwhile commerce flourished in such cities as Warszawa, Krakow, Piotrkow, Grodno, and Lublin, where the Sejm met and the noblemen assembled. Other cities, where miracles were supposed to have occurred, also prospered, and there were over a hundred of these towns to which thousands of pilgrims journeyed each year to see their wonders. Next to the noblemen, in second social place, stood the townsmen, whom we might call the middle class. The whole life of the State was controlled by the noblemen, who continued to gain in influence and in political privilege during the reign of the elective kings.

The church, and especially the different religious orders of which the Jesuits were the most powerful, took complete charge of educating the youth.

During this period there were seven hundred and fifty monasteries, not counting a thousand or more churches, in Poland.



Peasants from southeastern Poland.



Folk costumes of Silesian mountaineers.

The noblemen were raised and tutored by the monks. According to the laws and customs every nobleman was presumed the equal of every other nobleman, but in reality the wealthier aristocrats, having more money, had wider political influence. Since every noble family tried not to reduce or separate their estates, but to strengthen them by wise marriages and other speculations, there soon came into being large wealthy clans. These families pushed south and east where the lands and forests were richer and more abundant, and where poorer peasants, capable of slave labor, were to be found. The kings, goaded on to war, usually attacked in the south or east in order to capture these territories for the avaricious and selfish nobles who led them by the nose.

The nobility, both the very wealthy and the poorer titled gentry, amused themselves all year round by traveling about to visit one neighbor or another, attending church or family celebrations and banquets. There is a Polish proverb, dating from these times, which says, "Guest in the home—God in the home." Enjoying themselves with *wódka*, honey, and great varieties of food, different kind of sausages, mushrooms, bread, cheese, and so forth, the gentry passed their time in dissipation from morning till night. Their feasts were accompanied by songs and dancing.

The oldest Polish dance is the *polonez*, and an Italian traveler, Marescotti, who was visiting Poland during the reign of King Jan Kazimierz, after witnessing the step, said, "*piu tosto passeggio che ballo*," which means "more of a slow walk than a dance." The *polonez* was not danced exclusively by Poles, but soon came to be a popular dance in the wealthy homes of the French and Italians. Besides this dance, there were others belonging to that period which are not danced today, such as the *wyrwany*, *goniony*, *mlynek*. These were originally peasant dances, but soon they crept into the palaces of the noblemen. Later, much later, other dances from the villages entered court

circles—the *mazur*, *kujawiak*, *oberek*, *krakowiak*. Next to the polonez, they soon became Polish national dances which are still danced today throughout the country and among Polish immigrants residing on foreign soil.

The men and women of the courts wore silks imported from Italy, satins, damasks, and velvets brought in from the Near East. The women wore jewels on their arms and necks and used them to decorate their dresses. Their dress was often so glittering and overexaggerated that Jan Kochanowski, the Polish poet, said, "Their estates together with all their peasants, barns, and livestock seemed to be sitting on their backs."

The only people who rebuked the laziness, extravagances, and corrupt politics of the nobles were the Protestants, who lived simply and honestly and spent their spare time in learning. So it was to be expected that the powerful Catholic noblemen despised the Protestants and especially their writers and preachers. Because the Protestants were in the minority, they suffered much religious persecution in spite of the fact that in the year 1573 a law was passed guaranteeing religious freedom. Every newly elected king, on coming into power, signed this Warszawa statute of religious freedom, but, in spite of it, the noblemen and Catholic clergy did as they pleased and persecuted the Polish Protestants unmercifully. The nobility and clergy, with all the power in their hands, disregarded this scrap of paper signed by kings who always sought the favor of the wealthy. And whenever there was war, disagreement, or other social trouble between the nobility, the peasants, and the middle class in the country, the first to be blamed for the disunity were those opposed to the Roman Catholic Church, for this was an excellent way to divert the attention from the unrestrained privilege of one group—the nobles—slowly and surely leading the country to ruin with selfish and corrupt governing.



CHAPTER 16

The Glory of the Last Kings

THE STORY OF EUROPE is a continuous story of conquest, or attempted conquest, by one country or another.

Now, in the mid-seventeenth century, it was the Sultan of Turkey who again decided to extend his rule over southern Christian Europe. He sent two hundred thousand soldiers under his commander, Kara Mustafa, to capture Vienna. The Pope and the Austrian rulers begged the Polish King, Jan the Third, to come to their assistance and help besieged Vienna. According to one of Jan the Third's court writers, the outcome of this war looked very unfavorable for the Christian side at the beginning.

"Vienna was in such a state of turmoil and apprehension that, if the King had not moved quickly, the commanders of the city would have capitulated, supinely surrendering the fortress to the enemy. Some of the people were killed; others exhausted; still others, weak from hunger, had to eat cats and rats. Meanwhile the Turks had succeeded in blowing up many defensive ramparts and walls."

Jan the Third found it impossible to secure the approval of the Sejm and mobilize the desired army of one hundred thousand men in the short time at his disposal, but with thirty thousand Polish soldiers, he set out as fast as he could to rescue Vienna, the capital of Austria.

In the early morning of September 12, 1683, King Jan, at

the head of the Polish and German armies, launched his attack on the Turks under Kara Mustafa near the city of Vienna. The furious battle continued ceaselessly throughout the day and finally ended with Vienna a free city. In a letter to his wife, Marysienka, this is how the King described his entry into Vienna:

"To-day I entered the city, which would not have been able to hold out more than five days longer. The human eye has never witnessed such terrible sights as had here been wrought. The Emperor's palace was torn apart by bullets. All the armies, having fought their utmost, give to God and to us the credit for winning the war.

"Everyone kissed me and called me Saviour. Later I visited two churches where all the common people kissed my hands and feet while others just touched my clothes calling out, 'Oh, let us kiss the hands of the brave one!'"

The King pursued the Turks as far as Hungary. Later he wrote another letter to his wife, describing his triumph. "Our God and Lord will for centuries be blessed, for he has given such victory and fame to our nation as never before in its past history has it known."

This great military success of King Jan's near Vienna was the beginning of the end of the powerful Turks, but it also was the last great victory of the Polish kings. Indeed, Jan Sobieski died, almost forgotten, in his magnificent palace in Wilanow near Warszawa in the year 1696.

With his death, affairs in Poland went from bad to worse. The next King was elected through the support of the Russian Tsar Peter the Great. He was Frederick August, of one of the leading Protestant families of Saxony. At his coronation, he chose the name August the Second, but he was usually called "Sas" in contempt by the Polish people. During his reign, he and his ministers and the court amused themselves with all sorts of pleasures instead of occupying themselves with

matters of State until the people began to say, "Eat, drink, and be merry with King Sas." When he entangled Poland in a war with Sweden at the instigation of his patron, the Russian Tsar, the nobles, who were opposed to the war, elected a new king, Stanislaw Leszczynski, a Poznan Voivode. When the Swedish King, Charles the Twelfth, defeated the Russian army, August the Second had to escape to Saxony, leaving the throne to Leszczynski. But the tide of fortune turned in 1709, when Tsar Peter the Great defeated Sweden near Poltava. Then King Stanislaw Leszczynski had to resign in his turn and make his escape from the country. August the Third, another Saxon of the family of the German monarch, was made king.

A very tragic period for Poland ensued. Her two neighbors, the one on the east and the other on the west, began to interfere in the internal affairs of the country. Representatives in the Sejm, who, it developed, had been bribed, began to vote for a reduced army. Religious intolerance rose to outrageous heights and ignorant conservatism spread dangerously. The peasant slaves on the estates of the noblemen were permitted no rest, forced even to work on holidays. Most of the favorable reforms which earnest men introduced in the Sejm were nullified, not by a majority vote, but by one bribed representative who, by calling out "Liberum Veto" wiped out the whole resolution. This cry, "Liberum Veto," had been used long before this, but now in the eighteenth century it became the cry of a traitor and the loss of a nation. There were ever more and more cries of "Liberum Veto" from representatives who were in the pay of the Russian Tsar or the Prussian King. Those bills which were passed were those which continued to weaken the nation. The word *szlachta* (nobleman), because of all these unsavory connotations, has to this day an unpleasant and distasteful sound to liberal-minded Poles. For the *szlachta* brought fatal ruin to their country! But they, on the other hand, continued to be proud of their power to bring about so much



KAZIMIERZ PUŁASKI

disorder, saying, "Poland exists only because of disorder."

King August the Third, not being able to speak Polish too well, spent his time in pleasures and hunting and made no effort to interfere in the affairs of the nation. He left the entire administration in the hands of his ministers, one of them—the slyest of them all—was Saxon Brühl, of the same nationality as the King.

The noblemen at this time were divided into two groups, those who received the favors of the king and his ministers, and those who fought for these favors, positions, and honors. The leading conspirator and plotter was Stanislaw August Poniatowski, the nephew of Prince Adam Czartoryski. Poniatowski—cunning, handsome, and without scruples—secured the love and favor of the Russian Princess, Catherine, who was later known in history as Empress Catherine the Second. With the help of Russia, he intended to overthrow August and transfer the throne to Adam Czartoryski. August, all unknowingly and unwillingly, assisted in these plans by dying in Dresden on October 5, 1763, on one of his journeys to Saxony.

The family of Prince Czartoryski acted quickly. The castle and the Sejm building in Warszawa were immediately occupied by the prince's private army, and the Russian forces, at the command of Empress Catherine the Second, invaded the capital. But the Russian Empress tricked Czartoryski and announced that, as candidate for the Polish throne, she would support her lover, Stanislaw Poniatowski. In 1764, about six thousand outstanding aristocrats assembled from Poland, known as the Crown, and from Lithuania, for the election of the new king. Stanislaw August Poniatowski was chosen as the next ruler and the coronation took place on the birthday of the Russian Empress. Actually the head of the State was not Poniatowski, but the Russian diplomatic envoy, Prince Repnin, who in one of his reports wrote, "The King regards our interests as his own."

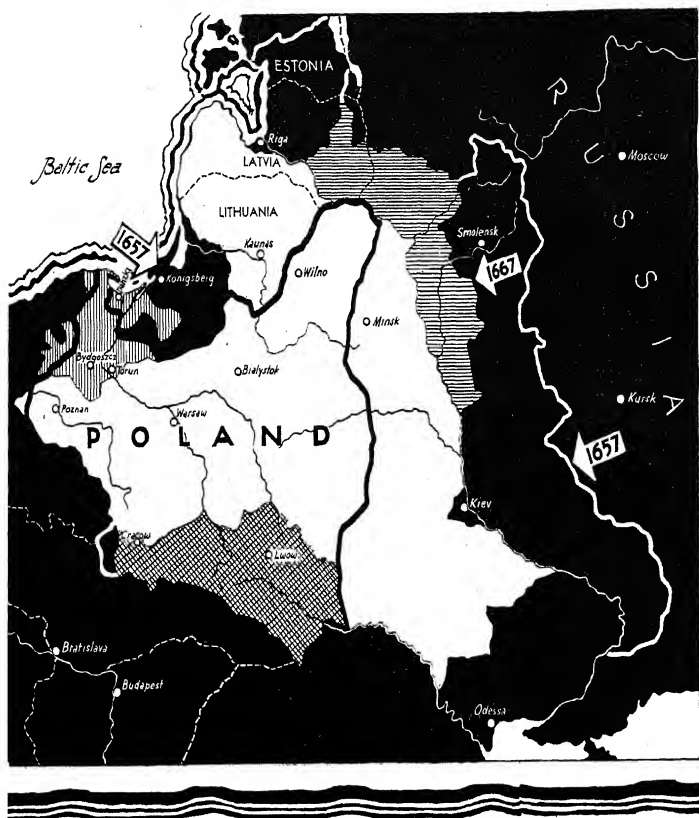
A large part of the community arose in opposition to the King's easy submission to Russia. The leaders of the resistance were kidnapped late at night on the order of Prince Repnin and taken into the interior of Russia. This insulting outrage by a foreign diplomat immediately started a revolt against the King and his politics. In the town of Bar in Podole a confederation of resistance was started under the leadership of Bishop Adam Krasicki, Jozef Pulaski and his three sons, of whom Kazimierz distinguished himself most highly. The main purpose of these patriots was to arouse the whole country against the traitorous King and to chase him out of the country, together with the Russian Prince Repnin and the army of his Empress.

The Russian army aided the treacherous King to crush the uprising in Podole. But uprisings spread elsewhere, to Krakow, and to the west and central parts of the country. Kazimierz Pułaski was in command of the forces around Krakow. His leadership was most successful and the troops under his direction occupied more and more territory. When he reached Czestochowa, the Russian army was forced to retreat before him.

At the same time, the Cossacks in the eastern part of the country started an uprising of their own to free themselves from Polish rule. A massacre of the nobles took place and all the courts in the provinces of Wolyn and Podole were burned. Then Russia ended the war with the Turks with which she had been engaged and sent her entire army into Poland to suppress the patriotic struggle. At the same time, the Prussian King, Frederick the Great, aware of a glittering opportunity, wasted no time. He devised a scheme to cut up his eastern neighbor and induced the Russian Empress Catherine the Second and the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa to join with him. Under the pretext of stamping out the existing disorder and anarchy in Poland, these three neighboring countries occupied

different parts of the country in 1772. Poland was left with only seven and a half million people on territory that covered less than ten thousand square miles. This was the first partition of Poland.

Kazimierz Pulaski, one of the bravest and most liberal-minded leaders of the confederation of resistance, had to escape from the country of his birth. He took ship for America, where at that time the war for independence from England was being waged. In September 15, 1777, after his gallant participation in the Battle of Brandywine, the American Congress bestowed upon him the rank of Brigadier General and gave him the command of the entire United States cavalry. Two years later, in a battle with the English at Savannah, General Pulaski was killed fighting for American independence. Meanwhile his native country was slowly being swallowed into the fog of a long-lasting and oppressive slavery.



First Partition of **POLAND** 1772

By **PRUSSIA**, **RUSSIA**
and **AUSTRIA**



PRUSSIA
RUSSIA
AUSTRIA

This Map shows Poland after the First Partition by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1772. Prussia brought under control by the victory of Grunwald in 1410, had seemingly joined hands with Russia while perfecting her plans for the "Drang nach Osten."



CHAPTER 17

Lost Opportunities

THE THREE IMPERIALISTIC countries—Prussia, Austria, and Russia—surrounding the shrunken country of Poland were absolute monarchies with unrestricted power resting in the hands of the rulers. An ever-increasing number of government officials carried out the orders of these three leaders who kept their subjugated peoples under the strictest discipline, severely punishing anyone who did not carry out their commands. The unlimited power of the crowned heads of these countries gained by the sweat of their citizens made Prussia, Austria, and Russia the leading powers in Europe. At this time—the second part of the eighteenth century—Poland was in a state of great confusion, due to the stupid license of the noblemen, the empty state of the State treasury, and the empty heads of many of her citizens.

After the first partition of Poland in 1772 a movement of reform sprang up throughout the country. Progressive leaders urged the need to build a modern State based on an understanding and intelligent freedom, quite different from the monarchical dictatorship of the neighboring States. The first ministry of education, called the Educational Commission, was founded to institute and carry out reforms in the schools. A very wise priest, Stanislaw Konarski, was the inspiration of these reforms in the elementary and secondary schools. Father Konarski said, "Our country will be what our children make

of it, for some day they will govern its affairs. Children retain the habits and way of thought and of life that are implanted in them from childhood. That is why intelligent people know that the welfare of a nation depends on wise and prudent education of the young." Konarski, educator and social worker in a cassock, would be called a "red" in the twentieth century for his radical ideas.

There were others also, who, with clear heads and minds, supported social and political reform—Hugo Kollataj, Staszyc, Wybicki, Andrzej Zamojski. The progressive ideas of Voltaire, Rousseau, and the French Encyclopedists were lauded and emulated by the Polish leaders. The manufacturer Tyzenhauz built new factories; the poet Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz wrote inspirational works; and hundreds of other writers, educators, manufacturers, and politicians supported reform programs for their subjugated country.

This was not a simple thing to do, for it seemed impossible in fifteen short years to educate to civic responsibility the noblemen who for hundreds of years had lived on the labor of others. They were obstinate and refractory. Many of them, like Szczesny Potocki, received incomes of about three million zlotys yearly and freely gave this money left and right to impede progress and prevent the introduction of reforms into the country.

But under the influence of the social reformers, a Sejm assembled in 1788 in the truncated country of Poland to deliberate civic improvements and to put through certain laws in the political and social departments. The time for these discussions was most opportune, because Russia was then occupied with a war against Turkey and the Prussian King was flirting with the Poles because he wanted to win them over to an alliance with him against Russia.

The Sejm deliberated for four years and by 1791 began to be known as the four-year-old Sejm. During all this time waves



This Map shows Poland after the Second Partition of 1793, by Russia and Prussia. Austria received no further spoils this time.

Second Partition
of **POLAND**
1793

By PRUSSIA & RUSSIA

	PRUSSIA
	RUSSIA
	AUSTRIA

of liberal thought were infiltrating Poland from France, where, in Paris, the first democratic parliament, known as the General Assembly, was established and, very shortly, the French King Louis the Sixteenth ceased to be called the "Lord's Anointed," but became instead "Citizen Louis Capet."

In Polish towns, political clubs on the French pattern were formed among the poorer classes of the people. It began to be apparent to the lesser nobles in the villages that they could gain only by backing wide social reforms in the country, rather than by supporting the millionaire counts and princes. Revolts broke out among the poverty-stricken and oppressed peasants. The great sociologist and reformer Stanislaw Staszic demanded that the four-year-old Sejm abolish servitude, divide the land among the peasants, and equalize the rights of the townsmen and noblemen. He also advocated in his writings a hereditary throne, the expansion of the army to one hundred thousand, and the complete destruction of the pernicious *Liberum Veto* by which one protesting voice could suppress a bill supported by a majority in the Sejm.

Hugo Kollataj went farther still, for he demanded that there should be peasant representatives in the Sejm and that Poland should unite with her old territory of Slask, which was rich in coal and iron and at this time controlled by the Prussian King.

Franciszek Jezierski distributed pamphlets throughout the country, calling on the peasants, the lesser noblemen, and the townsmen in rousing terms to organize and to send delegates to King Stanislaw August Poniatowski to stand behind reform programs and progress.

In this atmosphere, the Constitution of the Third of May was born, and passed by the Sejm in Warszawa in 1791. It was a very liberal document for those times. Signed by the senators, it was sworn in by the irresolute King Stanislaw August Poniatowski. Under its law, the power of the King



Tadeusz Kosciuszko taking the oath. From the painting by W. Kossak.

was strengthened, the *Liberum Veto* was abandoned, a majority vote in the Sejm was to be the conclusive decision on any bill. All the laws were to be enacted by the Sejm, which was to assemble regularly every two years. The rights of the townsmen were made equal to those of the noblemen. The peasant alone was not given proportionate freedom. But from that time on, all doubtful questions arising between the peasants and the nobles were to be settled by the State court; a peasant could exchange his servitude to an overlord by the payment of rent for the land. Now that the State guarded him to see that no wrong was done to him, the peasant was no longer the exclusive property of the nobleman on whose land he lived. The weakest and unfairest feature of this Constitution of the Third of May was the fact that, even though the peasant was in the majority in Polish society, he did not receive equal rights socially or politically with the townsman or nobleman. Difficult times were coming to the country and the government should have had the complete support of the peasants, the backbone of the nation; the State should at least have made a pretense of independence for the peasant so that he would fight for a better position for Poland in Europe.

But even these reforms, weak and restricted as they were, were too much for the powerful and wealthy magnates—Szczesny Potocki, Ksawery Branicki, Seweryn Rzewuski, and many others.

A few days after the constitution was voted on, they plotted together in the town of Targowica in the Ukraine, asking the help of the Russian army. Against these treacherous enemies of the constitution and of progress, the State authority dispatched an army of thirty thousand soldiers, under the leadership of the King's nephew, Jozef Poniatowski, and two generals, Kosciuszko and Zajacek.

The battle was unequal because the Russians outnumbered the Poles two to one—to say nothing of the army mobilized by

the wealthy Polish traitors. What was more, King Stanislaw Poniatowski, himself, went over to the side of the noble betrayers of their country. The conflict ended with defeat for the patriots, and Russia and Prussia partitioned Poland for a second time in 1793.

One of the patriotic leaders who fought against the Polish traitors and the Prussian and Russian usurpers was Tadeusz Kosciuszko. He distinguished himself for his bravery, and before he died became known as the "Hero of Two Continents," for he fought not only for the freedom of his own country, but for the independence of America as well. For his part in America's great struggle for freedom, the United States Congress in 1783 conferred upon him honorary citizenship. He had a broader conception of liberty than others of his time, as his will proves. In that document, he wrote directions about what should be done with the land which had been given to him by grateful Americans. Here is a portion of this will, dated May 5, 1798:

"I, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, before my departure from America, announce that I authorize my friend, Thomas Jefferson, to use my whole property in the United States to buy from his own estate or from other proprietors, as many Negro slaves as possible and give them liberty in my name, to educate them in a trade or in some other capacity, and to teach them about their changed positions, and about their moral duties, so that they will make good citizens, good husbands, and good wives. They must also be taught to defend their own liberty and their country, to stand for good social order, and everything that will make them happy and useful citizens."

In 1826, a part of the Kosciuszko estate was used to build the first Negro public school in Newark, New Jersey.

But in Poland, the efforts of Commander Tadeusz Kosciuszko were the opposite of successful. In 1794, the uprising against the enemy invaders, which was called the "Kosciuszko Insurrection," was put down in spite of the heroism of the peasants—Wojciech Bartosz and thousands of others. In 1795, a third, and this time complete, partition of Poland took place. Russia, Prussia, and Austria seized the remaining Polish territory, including Warszawa, Krakow, Lublin, and other big cities. Poland ceased to exist. But the struggle for freedom never stopped.

The leaders of the insurrection escaped abroad and after them went thousands of other patriots who fled secretly to Switzerland, Italy, or France, anywhere where they could organize and fight for "our freedom and yours." Everywhere and at every opportunity in those countries in which they had sought refuge, they supported progress and opposed reaction, because they knew that if great freedom came to other countries of Europe, sooner or later it would creep into Poland.

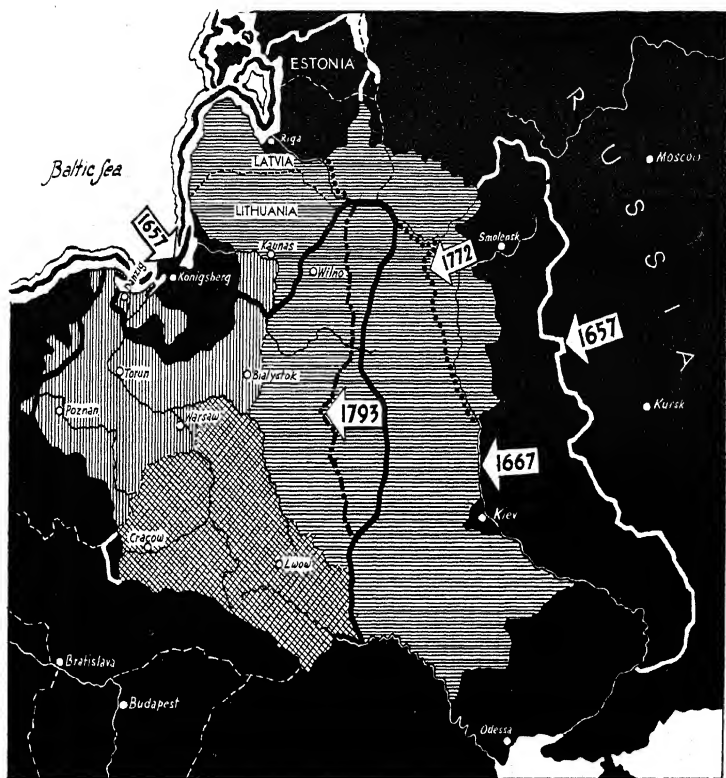
The Poles put their hopes in General Napoleon Bonaparte, who promised that he would free them from their oppressors, Prussia, Russia, and Austria, if they would enlist in his army. General Dabrowski, who was an active participant in the Kosciuszko insurrection, believed more firmly than anyone else that Napoleon was sincere in his promises. He organized a Polish legion which he hoped was one day to enter Warszawa by the side of Napoleon's army. At this time a new national song was born to take the place of an old religious war hymn. The legionnaires on foreign soil sang this song as they marched to a war for freedom. The first stanza goes like this:

"Jeszcze Polska nie zginela

"Kiedy my zyjemy.

"Co nam obca przemoc wziala

"Szabla odbierzemy."



Third Partition of **POLAND** 1795



This Map shows Poland after the Third Partition by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1795. Poland disappeared entirely from the Map of Europe. Warsaw was given to Prussia.

A liberal translation of this is:

“Poland is not lost

“While we still live.

“What a foreign state has stolen

“We shall retake with the sword.”

This song has survived to this day, becoming the Polish National Anthem.



CHAPTER 18

November Insurrection

AT THE SLIGHTEST whisper of the name of Napoleon Bonaparte all Europe trembled. In the year 1807, master of Europe, Napoleon had an opportunity to create an independent Poland, when he made peace with Russia in the city of Tilsit near the Niemen River. By such a gesture he might have gained the respect and loyalty of the Poles for ever. But he failed to live up to his promises, though Polish blood was spilled to help him gain his victory over the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian armies. Instead of giving the Poles a genuine State, he gave them a part of central Poland, inhabited by only two and a half million people, and called the Grand Duchy of Warszawa. The Polish patriots felt that Napoleon had mocked their sincerity and the sacrifices they had made. The fact was that the Emperor was no longer interested in the Poles because his head was completely turned by his triumphs in Europe. He no longer needed help from anyone—all he had to do was give an order and all the peoples of Europe were forced to obey.

But his good fortune did not last very long. During his move on Moscow in 1812, Napoleon's glory paled somewhat, when he had to retreat with his beaten and half-starved men. In October of the following year he met defeat at the hands of the Prussian and Russian armies in the battle of Leipzig. The proud and obstinate little French corporal tried his luck once

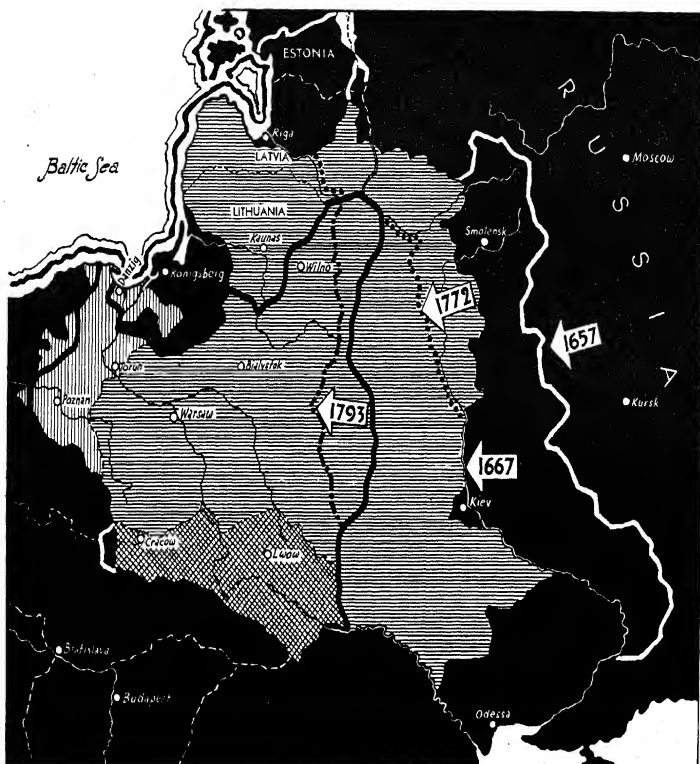
more in the battle of Waterloo and was completely defeated by the English and the Prussians. He was captured and exiled and later died in seclusion on the island of St. Helena.

In 1815, representatives of England, Austria, Prussia, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, and France assembled in Vienna to deliberate over the status of Europe. In the course of this conference, known as the Congress of Vienna, Russia offered to form a Polish State similar to Napoleon's Grand Duchy of Warszawa. This was to be known as the Congressional Kingdom of Poland, and the governing king was to be the "angelic" Russian Tsar. But large groups of Poles knew that this was not the road to a truly independent Poland. They knew that the three foreign occupants of the country had created only a fictitiously independent Poland, that each in his own way had plundered the country economically and culturally, systematically instilling hatred of one social class toward another.

The Polish patriots began to organize secret societies, preparing themselves militarily to destroy the hated occupants of the country. Like mushrooms springing up after a rain, these secret groups began to grow. People from all walks of life began to join—university students, intellectuals, townsmen, and even workers. Only the villagers took no very active part, because the peasant had had no freedom in the period of Poland's independence and consequently had neither gained nor lost after the country had been deprived of its sovereignty.

In the city of Wilno, the Filareci society was formed. Their motto was, "Motherland, Knowledge, and Virtue." One of the leading members of this organization was Adam Mickiewicz, the greatest poet of Poland. His poems, even at this time when he was still a young writer, inspired the people to resist the foreign rulers. In his "Ode to Youth," Mickiewicz cried out,

"Together, young friends,
"Happiness for all is everyone's goal."



This Map shows Poland after the Congress of Vienna, 1815. After the idea of re-establishing Poland as an Independent State had been abandoned, the ensuing policy of power culminated in the First World War.

In this poem, which became a sort of Bible to the youth, he condemned selfishness and lauded the power of cooperative work for the good of the whole society.

During the period of subjugation, a liberal masonic organization was formed, or rather was reborn, throughout the country, with its center in Warszawa. The members of these secret masonic lodges were prominent people from the world of literature, science, politics, and the army—Major Lukasinski, Staszyc, Kollataj, Lelewel. The masons were active in fields of knowledge and economics, and worked ceaselessly to unite the nation to be ready for the moment of liberation.

The liberal spirit in Poland flamed still higher after the revolutionary outbursts in France which expelled the ruling Bourbon family and again in 1830, when the Belgian people rose against the ruling Hollanders.

The government of Warszawa was at this time in the hands of Grand Duke Constantine, acting in the name of the Russian Tsar Nicholas the First. He ruled through terrorizing the populace, strictly suppressing everything Polish.

In the officer's military school, a conspiracy was formed under the leadership of a young officer, Piotr Wysocki. According to the plans made by this handful of Polish officers, an attack was to be made on the Belvedere Palace, where the tyrant Grand Duke Constantine lived, on the night of November 29, 1830. Plans were also made to capture the Warszawa arsenal, where ammunition and arms were stored. After the arms had been secured, the next move would be to take command of the city and the country. The signal for the start of the uprising was to be the burning of a shed in the suburb of Solec on the outskirts of the capital.

One of the participants in this revolt was the poet Seweryn Goszczynski, who described these exciting moments in the following words:

"Our road led between the Belvedere palace and the bo-

tanical gardens. There was no interference while we were on our way. About every hundred feet along the railing surrounding the Belvedere grounds stood a guardhouse and in front of it, a Russian soldier paced back and forth. On seeing a soldier, one of us asked if the Grand Duke were at home? 'Yes,' replied the guard. Another voice from our group answered, 'He will have guests to-night.'

"Soon we hastened our steps. We began to run and suddenly we heard a noise that sounded like thunder coming from a distant guardhouse. This was the first clash between the Polish officers and the Russian cavalry. At about the same time the sound of bullets reached the outskirts of the palace. 'Death to tyranny!' our group cried out. A few of the Grand Duke's servants stood near the palace as we reached the gate; on hearing our cry, they immediately ran to close this entrance but they were too late. We met them at the half-opened gate and with a little push, swung it wide open; we were free to enter. All around us everything was quiet and empty. At this moment another of our detachments joined us. We ran through the first and second floors with nothing but the echo of our steps behind us. Nowhere could we find the Grand Duke. He had escaped us—the place was completely empty. We found only one man who was hidden behind a door—the vice-mayor, Lubowidzki of the capital city. The Grand Duke had managed to escape successfully.

"Just as we were hidden from view by the botanical gardens, right across from us in the alley, we heard a clatter of galloping horses. It was a detachment of cuirassiers coming to defend Belvedere. They reached their destination a few minutes after our departure."

In the city the writer, Maurycy Mochnacki, aroused the people to unite with the army of young Poles. Meanwhile the detachments under Goszczynski successfully united with Piotr Wysocki's groups. This is how the poet describes the action:

"With great joy we soon found ourselves near the arsenal, which was surrounded on all sides by our men. There was much motion, tumult and confusion among the insurrectionists, but for this cause every last one of them was willing to sacrifice his life if need be, ready for anything, with shining hopeful faces."

The arms from the arsenal were captured and distributed among the insurrectionists, and in a short time Warszawa and its suburbs were cleared of the Russians, who were on their way to Moscow.

Tsar Nicholas the First immediately mobilized a large army to attack Poland. A relentless war began in January 1831. In the battle near the village of Grochow many thousands of the Tsarist soldiers were killed, but the insurrectionists were finally forced to retreat by this overpowering force. One of the writers of that time who took part in the battle, Mrs. Klementyna Hoffman, wrote the following in her diary:

"Everyone talks about the battle of Grochow, saying it might have been won completely, but God turned his eyes away for a moment, our commanders faltered, and victory slipped through our fingers. The enemy, too, suffered greatly. They concentrated their full force on this one point and though our losses were great, the opposite side lost three times as many. Everyone fought heroically; it was hard to designate one above another, since every soldier was a hero."

Along with Mrs. Hoffman, Emilia Szczaniecka and Emilia Plater and many other women took part in the patriotic struggle. Emilia Plater even led a detachment of insurrectionists in Lithuania and achieved the rank of captain.

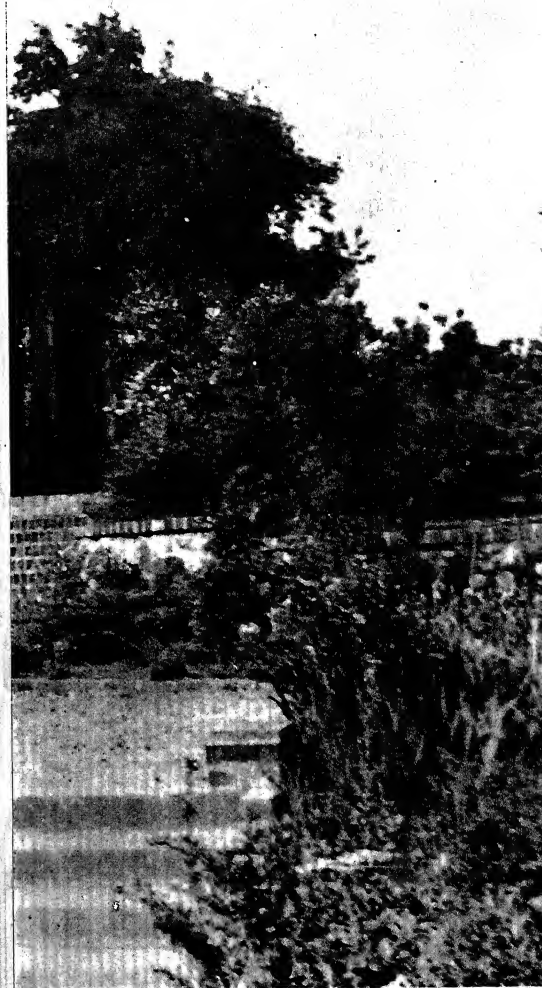
The main cause of the defeat of the insurrectionists was due to the fact that their forces were made up only of the youth from the schools and universities, some poorer noblemen and the townsmen. The peasants, who were the majority of the nation, did not take an active part in this action. They were

still in servitude and it made no difference to them whether they worked for the Polish noblemen or the Russian noblemen, in either case they had to work partly for nothing. The law concerning the peasants in the Constitution of the Third of May was not actually obeyed in daily life, because the Polish noblemen and the Russian rulers successfully sabotaged it whenever possible.

A suggestion was introduced into the Sejm by a representative, Jan Olrych-Szaniecki, who proposed that the peasants be freed completely, but it was rejected. The peasants knew that the struggle of the intellectuals and townsmen against the Tsar would not mean freedom or equality for them, even if it should be successful. The stupid group of administrators went so far as to allow certain Polish generals to disarm the peasants because they were afraid of a social revolution. The old commander-in-chief, the indolent General Malachowski, did not have the courage or the strength to make any decisive move in regard to the peasants or in relation to his subordinate generals.

Before long the Russian army captured the capital, Warszawa, and this concluded the patriotic insurrection in which thousands of citizens, soldiers and civilians alike, were killed. This was followed by raging untold terror among the people. Thousands of patriots were sent into the cold wastes of Siberia by the Tsarist rulers. The Congressional Kingdom of Poland was forced to pay a war contribution of twenty-two million rubles. Order was maintained by one hundred thousand Russian soldiers. Universities in Warszawa and Wilno were closed, together with other schools and cultural organizations throughout the country. Death, beatings, exile to Siberia were the payment levied for the "revolution" against the powerful Tsar.

But the Polish people would not give up their struggle for an independent country. Thousands of soldiers, writers, and scientists escaped from Poland to France, Switzerland, and



THE birthplace
of Poland's famous
composer Fryderyk Chopin, in Zelazowa Wola.

Italy, away from the Russian terror, where they could organize again for future independence. Among the many emigrants who fled the country were three of Poland's greatest poets, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Slowacki, and Zygmunt Krasinski.

Fryderyk Chopin was another great Polish artist found among these exiles. Ill all his life, he tried many times to return to Warszawa and fight the oppressor. His friends, knowing he had tuberculosis, prevented him from going back, but he suffered much mental anguish, because he was physically unable to help his country. But the great music he left behind him made up for his physical incapacities. The outcome of his sorrow and his love for his country resulted in his beautiful *Étude* in C minor, known as the "Revolutionary *Étude*." This magnificent work held all the passion that was in him—a burning love for his compatriots and a yearning for his country's freedom. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—all this was the basis for his "Revolutionary *Étude*."

Although these exiled emigrants were kept busy working to sustain themselves and to organize patriotic meetings, they felt lost and lonely in these foreign lands. The poet Juliusz Slowacki explained the emigrant's nostalgia in a letter to his mother, when he was staying at Lake Geneva in Switzerland. Here is a fragment:

"How beautiful it must be where you are. The sun is sinking behind the forests and the harvesters are singing together, as they return from the fields. The fragrant aroma of hay is filling the air. You, dear mother, are sitting on the porch looking at the road by which your son will never return. And whenever I think of this, an unspeakable sadness overtakes me, and I would give up everything just for one quiet evening to be on the old porch with you and our beloved friends."



CHAPTER 19

The People's Spring Comes to Poland

IN THE YEAR 1848, Europe roared like a lion and thrones trembled. Everywhere revolutions against the monarchical dictatorships broke out. This period in history was called the "People's Spring." In Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest the streets ran red with blood, and among the cries of the struggling masses were heard voices calling out for Poland's freedom. Great numbers of Polish emigrants rushed to help the revolutionists. Because of these uprisings the despotic monarchs were forced to sign constitutions for their people. France became a republic. In Poland a secret government was formed and a temporary underground army of ten thousand men was organized under the command of General Mieroslawski. But the powerful Russians, Prussians, and Austrians crushed each Polish revolt, one after the other. The Polish conservatives helped the usurpers by trying to convince the people that they must accept their fate and live in peace with the three foreign rulers.

The leaders of the conservatives were Aleksander Wielopolski, Tytus Dzialynski, and Professor Helcel from Krakow. Their philosophy was gradually to organize the economic life of the country, to raise its standard of living, and to build public schools and educate the masses so that in about one hundred years the nation would be prepared to conquer her enemies. All this meant that the conservatives wanted to wait. But the

Polish democrats had no such ideas. They immediately went among the people and began to organize them to be ready to take up arms. They were aided by the Jewish citizens who had distinguished themselves so bravely in the Kosciuszko insurrection of 1794, when they had created a number of Jewish cavalry regiments and two of their leaders, Berek Joselowicz and Jozef Aronowicz, had been heaped with praise and many honors for their bravery. Again, in the insurrection of 1831 many thousands of Jews were killed fighting for their country's freedom. In the second part of the nineteenth century Jewish citizens filled important rôles. As we have said, from the times of the first Piast kings, the Jews occupied themselves mostly with trade. As they traveled from city to city and village to village they were able to smuggle arms and ammunition, and to deliver messages and instructions from the commanders in the cities to the people in the villages.

With their business as an excuse to travel from one occupied zone to another, the Jewish merchants had wonderful opportunities to act as couriers and to smuggle not only arms but people. Besides this, many eloquent Jews were engaged in arousing the people against the alien rulers.

The leaders of the group who carried their inspiring messages into the villages were Matias Rosen and Rabbi J. Meisels. They dared even to publish their own paper, called *Dawn*, financed by a wealthy Jewish merchant, A. Sender, and written in the Polish language. A group of rabbis sent forth a proclamation to the Jewish people which began:

"In the name of the Immortal God of Israel and in accord with all the prominent members of our communities, we turn to you brothers of Israel, children of Poland—to fight bravely and courageously. Let us accept with brotherhood the hands offered to us. We implore you, brothers, to work wholeheartedly together with your fellow countrymen and support them

with your last breath in their noble struggle. Their good—is our good!”

While all this was going on, the people were being oppressed twice as much. In the part of the country under Prussian rule the Poles were thrown out of their farms and German colonists were settled in their place. Polish school and church buildings were used as storehouses for arms or as army barracks or, in the best instances, as German cultural institutions. In the part of the country governed by the Russians, the same situation prevailed, only here the Catholic churches were changed into Greek Orthodox churches. The new Tsar Alexander the Second, on arriving in Warszawa, announced to the Poles, “Give up your dreams of freedom! All revolts will be crushed by our army!”

Only in the Austrian part of the country were conditions a little better for the Poles. In 1859, when the Hapsburg Emperor of Austria-Hungary lost the war with France and Italy, he restored the Constitution and allowed parliament to assemble in his Empire.

The Russian Tsar, at the instigation of the Polish traitor, Margrove Wielopolski, found a way to force all Polish young men into his army. This was a trick to make any uprising impossible. The secret Polish government discovered this plan and set the twenty-second of January, 1863, as the day for an uprising in a proclamation stating that from that time on servitude was to be abolished. The document began with these words:

“All of Poland’s sons, without regard to faith or birth, nationality or wealth—you are all free and equal citizens! Join the ranks of the patriots and fight for the independence of your country!”

The conflict started in every corner of the Russian area. The sound of this new insurrection echoed throughout the democratic world and even reached America, which at this time was

occupied with her own Civil War. Secretary of State Seward said of the Poles, "A gallant nation whose wrongs, whose misfortunes, and whose valor have so deeply excited universal sympathy. . . ." Many American papers and magazines published sympathetic articles about the struggle of the subjugated, but heroic, Polish people.

The irate Tsar sent about two hundred thousand of his best soldiers against the "Polish revolutionists." Because the insurrectionists were unable to mobilize a regular army, they fought as partisans, attacking their enemy from the forests and mountains. But at times they came out into the open and fought, as when General Marian Langiewicz and his detachments battled and defeated part of the Russian army.

It is worth noting that besides men of different nationalities—Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, White Russians, Lithuanians—many women took an active and courageous part in the struggle. They not only took part in the fighting, actually firing arms, but they supplied false passports, carried money, hid important documents, and made reports. Two Heirich sisters performed so many brave deeds that their names were known by everyone. The Russian Government promised a reward of a thousand rubles to anyone who would divulge the whereabouts of another courageous woman, Jadwiga Wolska. Henryka Pustowojt served as adjutant to General M. Langiewicz. A French teacher, Maria A. Lix, became a legendary figure for her bravery when the commander of her regiment was killed on the battlefield and she took over the command. An enemy bullet ripped into her head and almost killed her. Wounded, she was taken prisoner, and while she was being dragged half alive to be questioned, she managed somehow to escape into the woods to her own people.

The bravest of them all, without question, was Wiktorja Jankiewicz. During the battle near Uniejow she and her cousin took an active part in the engagement when their regiment

was besieged by overwhelming forces of Russians. Seeing no hope for the patriots, Wiktorja Jankiewicz explained the desperate situation to them and told them the only way out was by the bridge which spanned the river Warta. When the insurrectionists finally crossed the river she took a barrel filled with powder and blew up the bridge just as the Tsarist soldiers were crossing. Later she swam the river herself and reported immediately to Mielecki's partisan camp.

In spite of the heroism of the women and the defiant spirit of the thinly clad and poorly equipped partisans and soldiers of different nationalities, the insurrection once again was suppressed. Romuald Taugutt, the head of the Polish National Government, was captured by the Russians and, with four of his fellow countrymen, was sent to the gallows in the Warszawa citadel on August 5, 1864. As usual the Russian Government carried out cruel reprisals, persecuting the Poles unmercifully. Thousands were sent to Siberia for forced labor in the coal mines; other thousands were sentenced to the gallows in many of the villages and cities. Those who had resources, escaped to exile abroad. Again all Europe sympathized with and gave a home to the Polish refugees. Thousands journeyed to America, where they worked on farms or in factories, finding bread and freedom in their new country. As time went on more and more immigrants came to this land of wealth and opportunity, where Pulaski and Kosciuszko became famous heroes. Today there are about six million American citizens of Polish descent in the United States.

Although the insurrection of 1863 was a failure, the people of Poland never gave up hope of regaining their independence and actually making a reality of the "People's Spring." With challenging defiance and the stubbornness of a mule, they continued to work politically and socially on preparations to oppose the tyrants once more—perhaps this next time the downfall of their oppressors would be achieved. To the peasants,

theoretically free, the intelligentsia began secretly to bring knowledge and learning, teaching them and discussing problems with them on equal terms, and preparing them to be ready to liberate their motherland.

The spirit of a nation grows, regardless of the constant pressure put upon the people at every turn by their oppressors. Austria, Russia, and Prussia, and especially the last two, tried in vain to suppress everything Polish. But the whole nation—all classes—began a quiet, determined struggle, working wholeheartedly to rebuild their country spiritually and materially. The way was hard and filled with ups and downs, but there was progress and there was faith in ultimate freedom and a better future. Masses of the common people were learning the rôle they must play for Poland.



CHAPTER 20

On the Border of a New Century

TOWARD THE END of the nineteenth century, Poland, though still enslaved, attained stupendous heights economically and culturally and also in political knowledge. There is no denying that people are immortal in their struggle for progress.

Hundreds of thousands of peasants left their villages for the big cities to work in iron factories, textile mills, and in the coal mines of Slask. These groups of new workers rapidly accepted the tenets of a socialism the main purpose of which was to fight for the individual and for the nation. Capital from France, Belgium, and England streamed into the country to build factories in Warszawa, Lodz, Czestochowa, Katowice, and hundreds of other cities. The capitalists from abroad made better profits in Poland than they made in their own countries, because labor was cheaper and the land was rich in coal, iron, zinc, and other natural resources.

The Jews, persecuted by the Russian Tsar, migrated to Poland and expanded their trade, which grew with every passing day. The intelligentsia went to the villages to spread learning among the peasants. Their mission was concerned not solely with educating the peasant; they were intent on making improvements in agricultural methods as well. Circles of Education for the People were created, with Konrad Proszynski as one of the pioneers. In the sections of the country occupied by Austria, the peasants absorbed the progressive ideas of two

priests, Stojalowski and Holynski, and of Maria Wyslouch and her husband. In the regions under Prussian control, the moderate conservatist Maksymilian Jackowski and the priest Piotr Wawrzyniak worked to spread the same idea. Jozef Poplawski brought knowledge into the Russian-dominated provinces.

The cultural and political movement among the peasants expanded in great measure, and in 1895 a Peasant party movement, which started first in the Austrian partition, soon spread over all of Poland and later played a big rôle in the period of her independence. The organization was sincerely democratic and was guided by earnest leaders whose main dream was to build a just and liberal country for the peasants and workers who never in history had been traitors to their country. One of the greatest sons of this movement was Wincenty Witos, who later became the peasants' leader. Though he was three times made premier, he never exchanged his peasant boots for a gentleman's shoes and never put a tie on his peasant shirt.

In the field of literature the impressive writings of Henryk Sienkiewicz, Aleksander Swietochowski, Maria Konopnicka, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Boleslaw Prus, Stefan Zeromski stood out prominently. Novelist, poet, and dramatist—all wrote about the little people who, through their personal sacrifices in work and battle, had gained a better existence for the individual and for the country.

Only one, Henryk Sienkiewicz, who later received the Nobel prize for his literary work—especially for his novel *Quo Vadis*—praised the noblemen and their past glory. The others, the poetess Konopnicka, the writer Swietochowski, and the novelists Orzeszkowa, Prus, and Zeromski, described the life of the simple people and the intellectuals and were very critical toward the noblemen.

Besides these outstanding representatives of literature, the famous scientist Maria Sklodowska was born in Warszawa in the year 1867. Later, after enduring much suffering and hard-

ship, in the year 1898, together with her French husband Peter Curie, she discovered the miraculous element radium, for which they received the Nobel prize.

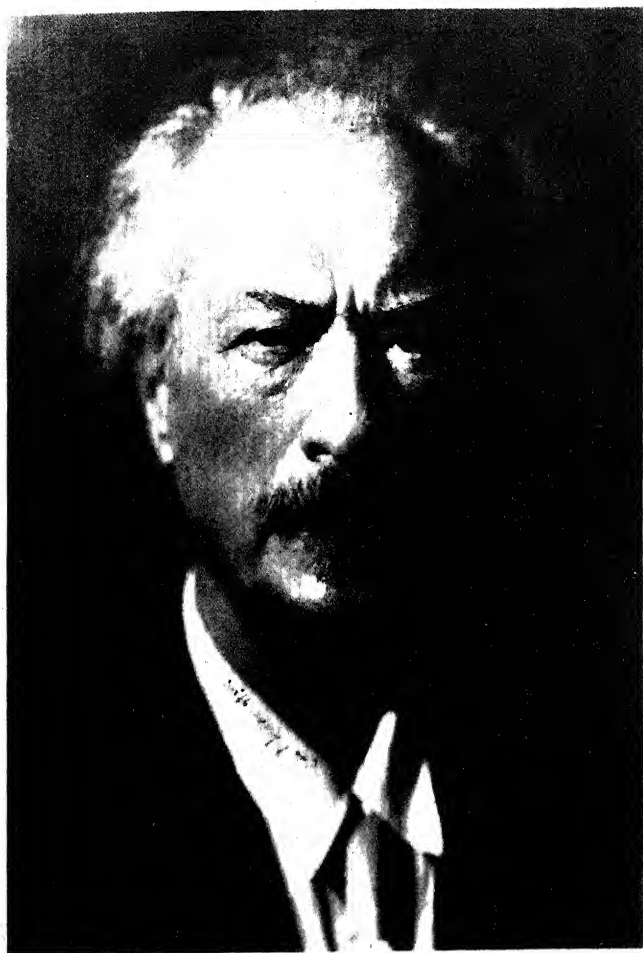
Among the people in the cities, the Polish Socialist Party played a positive and concrete rôle; the father of this group was Boleslaw Limanowski, sociologist and historian. This organization of the workers, whose praises were sung first by the poet, Boleslaw Czerwinski, in the early days of its formation produced many national heroes and a few worthy statesmen of whom Ignacy Daszynski was the most outstanding. Many of its members were killed in the streets of Polish cities in the 1905 revolution against the Tsarist regime.

At the end of the nineteenth century, thanks to the energy of individuals in every field of national life, thanks to the immortal will of the Polish peasant, worker, and scholar to fight for liberty, Poland, despite her oppression, was able bravely to await a new dawn. The preparations made for this national rebirth progressed rapidly. Confidence and faith were not only inculcated by poets, politicians, and social workers but also by one man of undying fame in another art. He was the painter Jan Matejko. This man—master of the brush and of color—lived a long time and never let a day pass without presenting on canvas some glorious moment in the history of his country. He created many masterpieces and his use of color and gift of expression put him on an equal footing with some of the greatest painters of the world. His great painting, "Poland's Christening," gave new hope to the people of the nineteenth century that the best spirit of Christianity would be reborn in the country. His large canvas, "Grunwald Battle," showing Slavic victory over the Teutonic forces, gave encouragement and inspiration to thousands of Poles who gazed at it, while they were enslaved by the Prussians. The painting "Kosciuszko in Raclawice," like so many other great works of Matejko, presenting the historical events in the life of the

nation, developed the national spirit and gave the Poles the defiant strength to stand upright, endure their present plight, and look forward to a brighter future.

At this time, the great talent of a young musician, Ignacy Jan Paderewski, born in 1860, was beginning to be recognized. He was later to gain renown both as a pianist and interpreter of Fryderyk Chopin's music and as a sincere patriot. Seven years after Paderewski, there was born another Pole, destined to occupy a foremost place in the affairs of the nation, who, by his governing of liberated Poland brought much misfortune and unhappiness to the people. His name was Jozef Pilsudski. Although both of these men came from the same class, they bore each other a mutual hate, and there was a vast difference in their understanding of how to govern their country. Paderewski believed in a parliamentary method of ruling a nation, while Pilsudski admired dictators, of which he proved a very poor example.

And later the unknown and insignificant peasant named Stefan Piast, who, in this book, symbolizes the people of Poland, was born at Count Ledochowski's estate in Adamowka. There were millions like him in Poland. It was their cheap labor which had helped to build the nation. Although Stefan could not prove he was a descendant of the Piast kings, he had the confidence and determination of the first rulers. He worked hard and believed in the strength of his country. This was worth more than all the crowns of gold. The good will and hard work of the peasants combined to make an unending capital on which the nation could build, grow, and survive. The future of a nation should be based on the common man who, in moments of danger, can always be depended upon. Stefan Piast was only one of 70 per cent of the Polish nation who, with bruised and dirty hands, stood stubbornly ready to fight and help at all times. If the peasant had been given the same opportunity to acquire knowledge as he had had for



IGNACY JAN PADEREWSKI

physical labor, he could have changed Poland into a land of milk and honey. Piast did not have much knowledge, but he had never given up hope. First he had worked for the count, hoping some day he would have his own land, a wife, and children.

Stefan, and millions of other peasants, resolved that their children must be educated and have the right to choose their own lives and to govern their country wisely and justly. He and his compatriots worked and fought for the future of those who would come after them. This was the great strength of the Polish peasant who was never afraid of a struggle or of war or any other cataclysm. The peasant moved forward, perhaps slowly, but in the end he would attain his goal.



CHAPTER 21

Poland Again Gains Her Independence

TOWARD THE END of July 1914 the First World War began. Germany and the so-called Central States fought against Russia, France, England, and other nations, who together were named the Allies. Filled with sacrifice, it was a hard struggle to see who would dominate Europe and the world.

Stefan Piast, living in the part of Poland under the Tsarist regime, was forced to serve in the Russian army with many thousands of other Poles. Journeying with his regiment, the Tsarist Twentieth Infantry, he found himself quite a distance east of Warszawa. When he heard the news of the formation of an independent Polish army, which was fighting against the occupants of his country, he made up his mind to desert the Russian army and in some miraculous way to join these Poles. He was very anxious to reach the legions of Jozef Pilsudski, for the man at that time seemed to be a sincere leader. In the meantime, while waiting for an opportunity to contact Pilsudski's agents, he began to work in a revolutionary underground political organization where he took part in many terror attacks against the Tsarist regime. This dangerous revolutionary work absorbed the fugitive from the Russian army completely. While he was thus engaged, news came that the United States had entered the war against Germany.

A rapid series of events followed. Poland was at last liberated, and on November 6, 1918, in the city of Lublin, a Polish



REPUBLIC OF POLAND in 1939

||||| Territory of the
Free City of Danzig

This Map shows the territory of reborn Poland after the First World War, with frontiers later accepted by all other nations, including the United States.

democratic government was formed with Ignacy Daszynski at the head. On the eleventh of November of the same year an armistice was declared, and a peace treaty was signed on June 28, 1919, at Versailles.

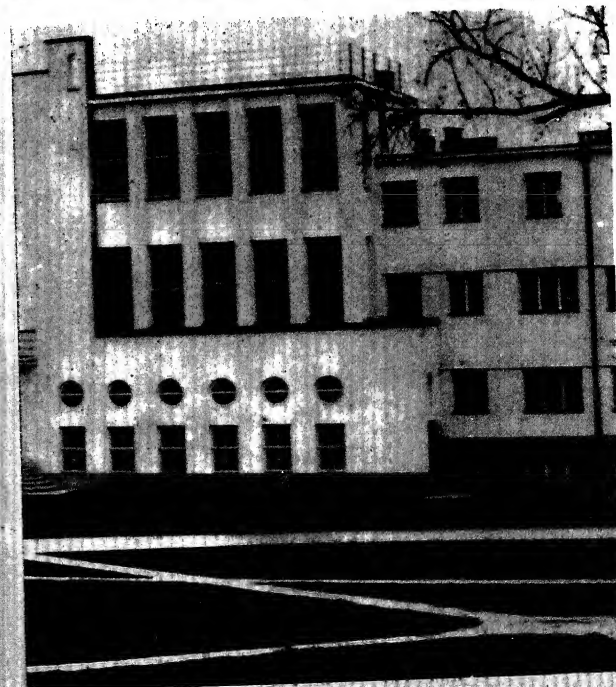
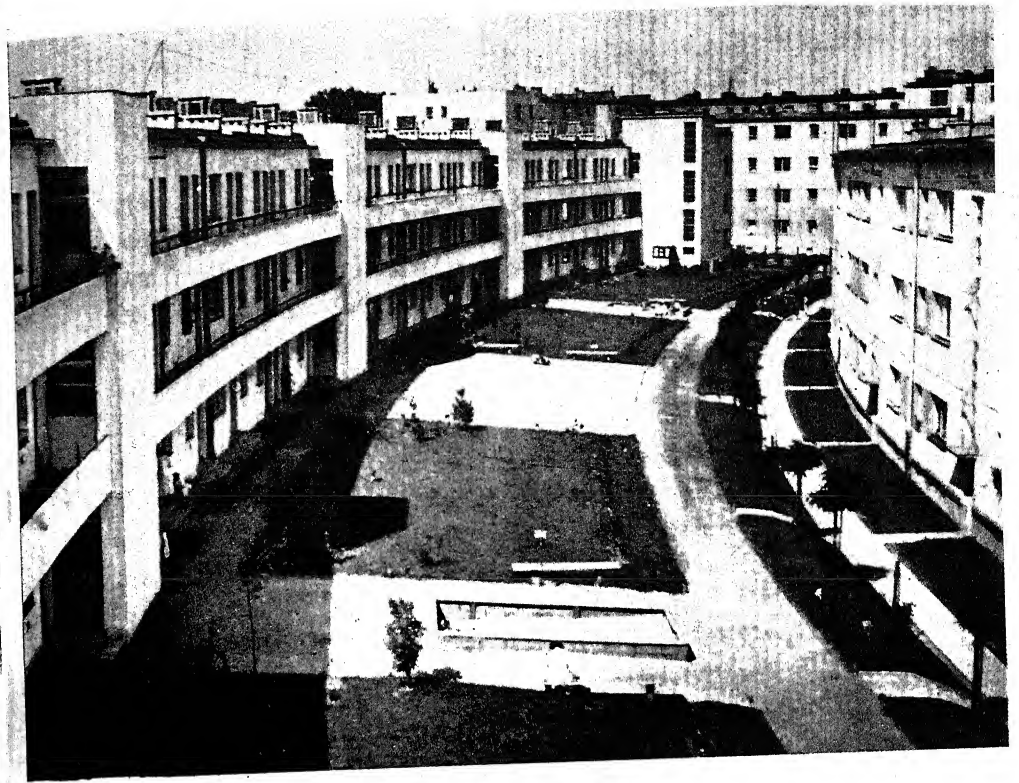
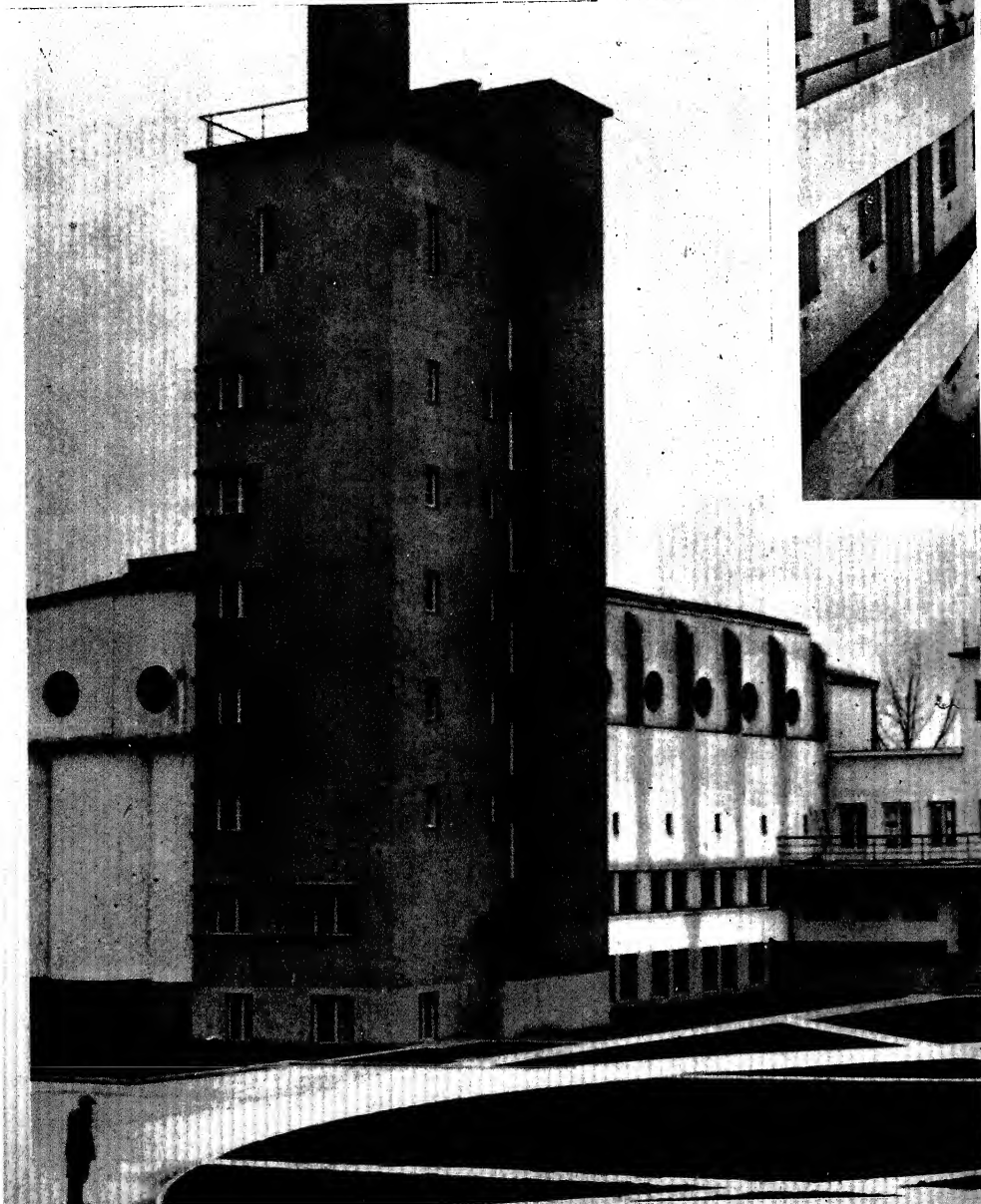
The war was ended in the western part of Europe, but peace did not long prevail in the east. Jozef Pilsudski in 1920, taking advantage of Russia's weakness caused by the war and the revolution of 1917 which established the Soviet Republic, advanced in the east with the idea of capturing White Russia, and the Ukraine and uniting them with Poland. The expedition against the young Soviet Republic failed completely and Pilsudski, always an enemy of the Polish democratic constitution of 1921 with its statement that the President and Government are responsible to the nation, withdrew from public life in disgrace.

Meanwhile, the Polish State began to rebuild its agricultural and cultural life. Factories and schools sprang up and peasants were given land bought by the Government from the owners of the large estates. It began to seem as if this young and liberal State would in a short time gain prosperity and take its rightful place among the other democratic countries of Europe.

Stefan Piast returned home from the wars to the village of Adamowka. Young and ambitious, he worked hard on his small piece of land. The black fertile earth brought forth wheat and rye; Piast build a home and barn, and with his wife Maria and his small children, began to enjoy such happiness as he had never known. His country was free at last, he had work to do, and he could see a brighter future ahead for his children. A public school was opened in the old mansion of Count Ledochowski, and from morning till night there was the echo of the laughter of children.

In May, 1926, Pilsudski, again coming on the scene, staged a successful *coup d'état* and became dictator. He was surrounded by people who could not hear the word "democracy"

At the time of the German invasion the cities of Poland had many modern buildings.



Modern homes for workers.

without crying "bolshevism." Gradually everything and everybody connected with the word came under the ban of official displeasure. The first to be thrown into the fires of persecution were the democratic parties, such as the Polish Socialist Party, and the Peasant Party. Pilsudski, himself, named the members of his government, changing them whenever and however he pleased. The army and police ruled the nation under Marshal Pilsudski's orders. Those who were neither army veterans, nor members of the Non-Partisan Bloc for Co-operation with the Government were unable to find the smallest government position. Gradually the whole country was held tightly in the hard fists of the generals and the colonels. Through it all, the democratic parties continued to struggle for the rights of the people, the majority of whom were still inspired by liberalism and tolerance. But what could these groups and the striking peasants and workers do against the army and the armed police?

In 1934, at the command of Marshal Pilsudski, the Polish government signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler, the new German leader; and in 1935, the Polish parliament, which was the creation of the government, passed a new constitution. Instead of holding the President and his Government responsible to the people, as the constitution of 1921 had done, the new constitution stated that the President and his Government were responsible only to God and history. God is too high to reach and one must wait for history, so meanwhile the President and the Government nominated by him did whatever they pleased in the State.

A period of economical, political, and cultural collaboration between Poland and the Third Reich followed, the aim of which was to be a joint attack on the Soviet Union. Pilsudski's death on May 12, 1935, did not weaken this collaboration, for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jozef Beck, who signed the non-aggression pact with Hitler, continued in Pilsudski's foot-

steps, working with those noblemen who yearned for their lost estates in the Ukraine and in White Russia.

Pilsudski's successor as Marshal was Edward Smigly-Rydz, whose word was law to the man who was then President, Ignacy Moscicki. Smigly-Rydz continued the policies favored by his predecessor. Such German leaders as Goering, Himmler, Franck, and officers of the Berlin General Staff journeyed to Warszawa for conferences. Russia saw what was going on around her. The Soviet Government sent a warning to Poland, and in December 1938 proposed a military pact between the two countries. But Minister Beck refused to hear a word of it. Meanwhile the German General Staff amiably advised, "We will supply the *Luftwaffe* and the motorized army and you will provide the cavalry." So Marshal Smigly-Rydz gave orders to his staff to triple the cavalry, which would be needed on the flat plains of the Ukraine.

In January, 1939, Moscow once more warned the Warszawa Government that Poland would meet the same fate at the hands of Adolf Hitler as Austria and Czechoslovakia had suffered, and again proposed a military pact which in case of war would allow the Soviet army to enter the western cities of Poland—Krakow, Katowice, Sosnowiec, Poznan. The Polish Government rejected the Moscow proposals with many excuses, chief among which was the fear of communism, because the peasants (70 per cent of the population) were still politically and economically oppressed. All workers' organizations were closed, and the concentration camp in Bereza overflowed with political prisoners.

Adolf Hitler, knowing Poland's exact military status, had no intention of sharing his future fruits of victory. On August 23, he signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, and attacked Poland on September 1. The Polish Government, influenced by strong pressure exerted by the people, moved to defend the western borders of the country.



CHAPTER 22

News of Home and Abroad

STEFAN PIAST with his wife and his four children continued to work in the Altai territory of Southern Siberia, sawing wood in the forests during the winter and, in the late spring and summer working in the fields. It was difficult for the Piasts to accustom themselves to the climate because the winters were so long and bitter cold, while the summers lasted so short a time. But in spite of all that, this section of the country of Southern Siberia reminded Stefan of his Wolyn home, because here too the tall birch trees, swaying in the breeze, had the same lovely green color as the trees at home.

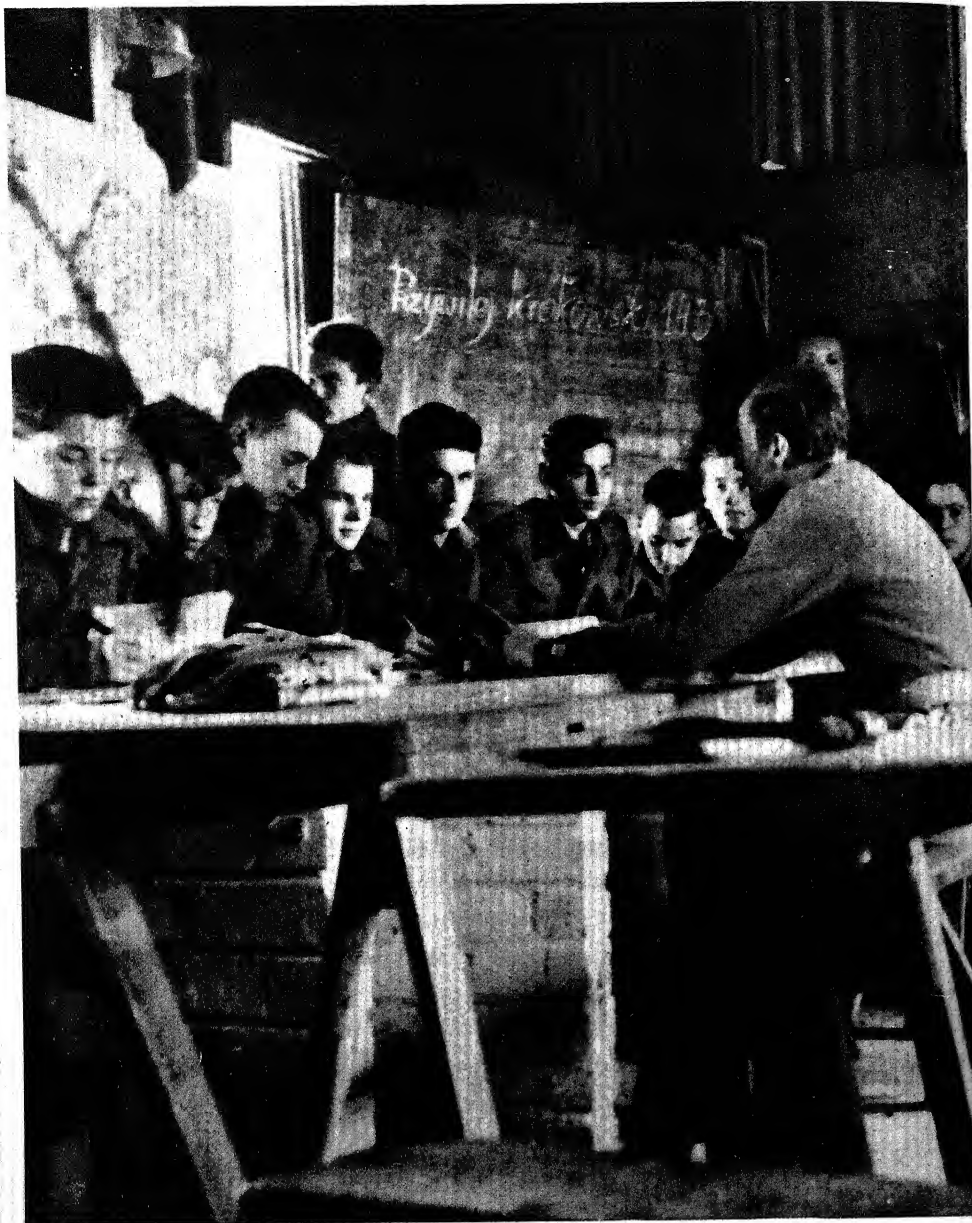
Stefan Piast was proud that he, an insignificant peasant, could contribute to Allied victory, even if it was only by physical labor. In the same colony with him were other Polish families who had voluntarily journeyed to the Soviet Union to work. Often in the evenings for moments of relaxation they gathered in the school building to listen to lectures, read papers and books, or to discuss different problems. Piast was greatly interested in the exchange of thoughts and ideas with other people of various professions who had gathered in the colony. Many of these temporary Polish colonists were opposed to the Soviet way of life. Piast felt otherwise and said, "It makes no difference to me how the Soviet nations are ruled or how they live. Nor do I care how Joseph Stalin dresses. I do know, however, that the standard of living for the Russian peasant

is no higher than ours. But then it is wartime! And the Germans dominate not only all of Western Europe, but they have also occupied almost all of the European part of the Soviet Union. If we had remained in Poland not one of us would have escaped the Nazi terrorists alive."

For proof of what he said, he showed clippings taken from the official publication of the Polish Government in exile in London, which stated that the Germans had murdered about three million Poles and that more than two million had been sent as slaves far into the Third Reich for forced labor. Stefan felt that General Wladyslaw Sikorski, who was Premier of the Polish Government in exile, was wise in his political dealings, gaining for Poland new friends not only among his own people but among the allies—America, England, and the Soviet Union. About one hundred thousand Polish soldiers were fighting on all the allied fronts, gaining the respect of the whole world for their dauntless courage.

When these citations did not convince Piast's opponents, he ended the discussion with these words, "I have studied history and I know that to resist the German *Drang nach Osten*—aggression to the East—we must co-operate with our neighbor, the Soviet Union, otherwise we shall cease to exist. Perhaps instead you would like to transport Poland to the South Pole, where there are neither Germans nor Russians?"

Many other Poles thought as Piast did. But those who had possessions in the Ukraine and White Russia were violently opposed to co-operation with Russia because they feared to lose their property forever. Like Marshal Pilsudski, they preferred to fight the Soviet Union, so that they could rule over the whole Ukraine and White Russia. There was nothing sacred or patriotic about their feelings. Most of them were the sons of the old noblemen who had always lived on the labor of others, and if they did work, they made so much noise about their sacrifices that it could be heard miles away.



UNDERGROUND schools similar to this school in the Middle East, carried on the education of Polish youth during the German occupation.

In the meantime horrible news came to the Polish colony in Russia over the Moscow radio and in the Soviet papers, and from Poles escaping to the East. The refugees listened to the news of the Nazi acts of terrorism, and more and more of them began to admit that Stefan Piast was right. In the eyes of many who had had some school education he was a wise, self-made realist.

This was some of the information that came to the Poles in Russia: The German Governor of occupied Poland, Hans Franck, announced, "The Poles do not need universities or secondary schools. Polish territory is to be transformed into an intellectual desert."

Schools in Poland were abolished completely, but the children were taught secretly in underground classes conducted by the powerful Polish Underground Movement. This group daringly published about one hundred illegal papers which had about three million readers. They also published school books and classics. Collections of political speeches made by leaders of the United Nations were read with great interest and were always sold rapidly. For example, the book of speeches made by Prime Minister Churchill of Great Britain sold five large editions.

The Polish partisans repaid the Germans for their reprisals by blowing up railroad cars carrying ammunition and arms to be used on the eastern front against the Red Army, and by attacking high officials in the Nazi administration. For every Pole killed, the Underground Movement attempted to kill a German, and so the struggle went on, gaining in ferocity and strength as time went by.

In the course of one month in 1943 the partisans destroyed eighteen military transports, three hundred and fifty trucks, one hundred and twenty locomotives; eight oil wells were rendered useless; nineteen railroads were derailed; and over five hundred German officers and soldiers were killed. In this

same month an important chief of the Gestapo secret police, Wilhelm Krueger, was found dead.

And in spite of this unequal fight, the Poles did not lose their humor, for while under the occupation, they published five satirical and humorous papers, such as *Szpilka*—Pin, *Lipa*—colloquial for “pulling one’s leg,” *Nowa Mucha*—New Fly. These papers, printed in cellars right under the noses of the Nazis, were filled with anti-German jokes and satirical poems. Here is an example of one sharp verse:

“They have no radio, yet they know everything.

“They have no bread, yet they eat cake.

“They have no army, yet they shall win the war.

“Who are they? They are the Poles!”

And for the Polish traitors, who claimed they were of German descent and called themselves *Volksdeutsche*, to gain favors and privileges from the Nazis, one of the writers, taking his theme from an old Polish verse, prophesied the following future:

“Who are you?—*Volksdeutsche* small.

“What is your symbol?—Gold and gain.

“Who gave you birth?—Riot and Pain.

“What is your future?—A tree and a rope!”

Another Pole wrote the following birthday greetings to his friends:

“A great many Jews minus arm-bands,

“A great many Poles smuggling food,

“A great many Germans lying dead,

“So much luck I wish for you.”

This greeting traveled all over the country and in a small way helped to give the patriots courage to fight.

On July 30, 1941, an agreement was signed between the

Republic of Poland, whose representative was Premier Wladyslaw Sikorski of the exiled government, and the Soviet Union. This mutual understanding brought about normal and friendly relations between the two countries. To the agreement was added this protocol:

"The Soviet Government grants an amnesty to all Polish citizens now detained on Soviet territory either as prisoners of war or on other sufficient grounds as from the resumption of diplomatic relations." Of these Polish citizens on Soviet territory (the Poles claim there were about 1,500,000 and the Soviets 300,000) a new Polish army began to form under the leadership of General Wladyslaw Anders. The agreement made between the Polish Government in London and Moscow was that each newly formed and trained division was to be sent to the front immediately. But General Anders delayed in sending his men into action, saying that his army was not sufficiently prepared or trained. And this went on while the German army was advancing rapidly into Russia, inspired by the joy of their tentative victories. Some Poles thought, "Why should we fight?—let one devil kill the other."

When the Soviet leaders again requested that the newly formed Polish divisions be sent into action, they received the same evasive answers from General Anders. Russia then deprived the Polish army of arms and reduced the food rations to the same amount as the Soviet inactive soldiers received behind the lines. In reply to this, General Anders moved his army to the Middle East. All this took place while the Germans were besieging Stalingrad.

Another reason for Soviet Russia's anger was the discovery by the Russian police of an organized espionage ring composed of Poles working for one of the Allies. This organization was formed without the knowledge of Prime Minister Sikorski. To top all, came the unfortunate "Murders in Katyn." The Polish Government, under strong pressure exerted by President Wlady-

slaw Raczkiewicz and the military clique under General Marian Kukiel, approached the International Red Cross with a plea to uncover the matter of the eleven thousand Polish officers who were murdered in Katyn, near the Russian city of Smolensk. Directly following this the Soviet Government severed diplomatic relations with the Polish Government in London on April 25, 1943.

Although the Soviets respected and favored Sikorski, they were convinced that the Premier could not restrain the strong reactionary forces in his government and they believed that these same reactionary forces would tend to split the Allies.

General Wladyslaw Sikorski was killed in an aeroplane crash on Sunday, July 4, 1943, and with the announcement of this tragedy came anxious queries about the man who would be his successor. Would he further the cause of collaboration and friendship with the Soviet Union or would he shatter the structure of friendship and co-operation that General Sikorski had so firmly and assiduously built? "Those who criticize our pact with Soviet Russia should wear the iron cross of Germany." So spoke General Sikorski in December, 1942, in Detroit during his visit to the United States. Many people, recalling these valiant words, hoped against hope that the man so suddenly called to Sikorski's high office would have his resolute purpose and his forceful voice. They hoped too that the new premier would have the quality of inspiring confidence and the will to serve that had been General Sikorski's great gift.

The press announced the man's name—Stanislaw Mikolajczyk—but not even diplomatic circles could reveal much about him. A few facts they had, of course—that he was of peasant origin and that he fought in 1939 as a private in the army. Several liberal Polish papers had carried stories of his escape from prison in Hungary, and now, by way of Yugoslavia and Italy, he had reached France, where he became Ignacy Paderewski's deputy vice-chairman in the Polish National Council.

Two other facts were known—that he had gracious manners and that in the British Foreign Office he is referred to as Poland's Anthony Eden, and this for two reasons—because he has tact in dealing with people and good taste in choosing his clothes.

But was he strong? That was the question. His picture had appeared in the American press too seldom for people to be acquainted with his broad, rugged, frank countenance, and the resolution and stubbornness in his chin. However, Mr. Mikolajczyk soon gave assurance of his worthiness to be General Sikorski's successor. Within forty-eight hours of his being called to office, a crisis of major importance confronted the new Prime Minister. By handling it quietly and resolutely, giving not one inch to the enemy, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk proved himself worthy of the trust the two great patriots, Paderewski and Sikorski, had put in him.

The crisis was this: President Wladyslaw Raczekiewicz appointed his friend General K. Sosnkowski to be commander-in-chief of the army. To the uninformed democratic American this may not have appeared to be serious, but it was. Since 1926, when Pilsudski took command of the Polish State, the Government had taken orders from the army, not the army from the Government. This meant that Prime Minister Mikolajczyk, peasant, liberal, and supporter of the Soviet pact, would have to take orders from an army chief, Kazimierz Sosnkowski, conservative, and one of the chief instigators of the foreign committee of the Polish National Party, organized for the express purpose of thwarting collaboration between Soviet Russia and Poland.

Acting Prime Minister Mikolajczyk vetoed this appointment with a firm "No." He knew, and no one could know better, how General Sosnkowski had fought that famous pact a year ago. He knew that Sosnkowski's chief advisor was the notorious fascist Tadeusz Bielecki, and that Sosnkowski's friends

were the leaders of a Falangist group of pro-Nazis and anti-Semites. He knew too that General Sosnkowski came of the Pilsudski tradition and had been a devoted follower of the weak and futile Smigly-Rydz.

Little wonder Prime Minister Mikolajczyk said "No," and little wonder he followed his resounding negation with an offer of his resignation. He knew that he, young, liberal, and heartily in accord with Soviet-Polish collaboration could not and dare not work with an avowed pro-Fascist

"Dare not," for Stanislaw Mikolajczyk was the leader of the Peasant Party, and that party represents 70 per cent of the people living in Poland. He knew that the great majority of the Polish people were working ceaselessly for Soviet-Polish collaboration, for he was constantly in contact with the Polish Underground Movement and was aware of the convictions of the Polish people. It had been his responsibility as well as his desire to further the work of the Underground, and he could not betray his people's trust in him by becoming subservient to the pro-Fascist General.

Mikolajczyk's resolute "No" to President Raczekiewicz proved his right to office. It proved that he was loyal to Soviet-Polish collaboration and to the resolution of the United States and Great Britain that the United Nations must be unflinching in their unity to fight their common enemy Nazism and Fascism.

And this bold "No" accomplished other things too. It released the Polish Government from the shackles put upon it by Pilsudski in 1926, for General Sosnkowski could not defy the man who had the support of 70 per cent of the people in Poland. Instead of attempting defiance, Sosnkowski said in his first daily order to the army on July 13, 1943, "The army has no place in politics. The army is going to take orders from the President."

This of course was only a political maneuver on the part of General Sosnkowski, for he knew his friend President Racz-

kiewicz, on the foundation of the 1935 constitution, was responsible only to God and history. Actually according to this constitution the President has dictatorial power, for he can nominate his successor and change the Government whenever he pleases. Premier Mikolajczyk had no alternative but to accept in his cabinet those members who were selected by President Raczkiewicz. Among the members were: the reactionary and good friend of Sosnkowski, General Marian Kukiel, Minister of Military Affairs; Rev. Zygmunt Kaczynski, Minister of Education; Jan Kwapinski, Socialist from the Middle Ages, Vice-Premier. To all these, add a few hundred counts, generals, and colonels, occupying high positions in the ministries and you can readily understand the situation in which Mr. Mikolajczyk found himself. The greater number of officers in the army of 100,000 and the whole machinery of government officials were against an understanding with Russia.

The Red Army by now had reached Polish soil. On the twenty-second of July, 1944, in the liberated Polish city of Chelm, a Polish Committee of National Liberation was formed, headed by the Socialist, Edward Osobka-Morawski, who was also the head of Foreign Affairs. This committee was further composed of Chairman of the Agricultural Department, Andrzej Witos, member of the Peasant Party; Vice-Chairman of the Committee, Wanda Wasilewska, a writer; Head of National Defense and Commander-in-Chief, Michal Zymierski, who was imprisoned by Pilsudski for refusing to aid in the *coup d'état* of 1926. Head of the Department of Rehabilitation and Indemnity, Dr. Emil Sommerstein, a known Zionist; Head of the Department of Culture and Art, Wincenty Rzymowski, member of the Polish Academy of Literature; Head of Propaganda and Information, Dr. Stefan Jedrychowski, from the University of Wilno; Head of Labor and Social Welfare, Boleslaw Drobner, a Socialist; Head of the Department of Education, Stanislaw Skrzyszewski, a professor from

Krakow. These were the outstanding members of the Polish Committee which announced the following manifesto to the Polish nation: "Democratic freedom will be restored and guaranteed—" "Parliamentary elections will follow after the liberation of the whole country—" "Immediate agricultural reforms—" "Employment for all with decent wages and a broad program of social security—"

Right after the recognition of this Committee by Moscow, reconstruction began. An army, half a million strong, was organized under the Polish leadership of General Zygmunt Berling, Aleksander Zawadzki, and Michal Zymierski.

A week after the formation of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, Premier Mikolajczyk of the exiled Government in London, advised by the Underground and friends, flew to Moscow for discussions with Marshal Stalin and members of the Committee in Chelm. Once in Moscow, Mikolajczyk understood that Russia's attitude toward Poland was not as unfriendly as the reactionary press and the generals and the counts from the diplomatic spheres had made it appear. Mr. Stalin stated clearly, "You liberals from London should come to an understanding with the Committee of National Liberation in Chelm and create a new government together."

Mr. Mikolajczyk's discussions with the Committee were very surprising, too. The Chelm Committee proposed that Mr. Mikolajczyk form a new government composed partly of members from the Committee of National Liberation and partly from the members of the London Government in exile—a government which would include such persons from London as S. Grabski, J. Stanczyk, K. Popiel, W. Banaczyk. The Committee requested Mr. Mikolajczyk to base his new Government on the liberal constitution of 1921, but the Premier insisted on keeping the 1935 constitution. Mikolajczyk admitted that the 1935 constitution is undemocratic, but urged that the legality of his present Government is based on this constitution. Besides his Govern-

This young wife of a Polish R.A.F. Pilot is receiving for him a posthumous D.F.C. from King George VI.





Many young Poles served in the armies of the Allies.

ment, based on the 1935 constitution, had made and signed many treaties with the Allies, and he believed that changing from one constitution to another at a time when there was no parliament, and the whole country was not yet liberated, might forfeit the confidence and trust of some Allies.

Premier Mikolajczyk could not come to an agreement with the Chelm Committee and was forced to resign by the opposition in London, who regarded the Committee as a group of traitors sponsored by Moscow. After this resignation, the right wing socialist, Tomasz Arciszewski, became the head of a new government. The new head of the Government-in-exile was determined to fight the Soviet Union diplomatically and by other means, with the purpose of having Poland's borders before 1939 returned to her.

Meanwhile the Chelm Committee, which had long ago agreed to give the eastern part of Poland up to the Curzon Line to the Soviet Union, moved its headquarters to Lublin, a larger Polish city, and began to govern all the liberated parts of Poland. On December 31, 1944, this committee proclaimed itself the Provisional Government of Poland and made certain changes in its own ranks. These changes did not alter the ideology or character of this temporary government, which had the full support of the Soviet Union and the greater part of the Polish people, the workers and the poorer peasants.

Osubka-Morawski became the Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs of this Provisional Government and General M. Zymierski became the Commander-in-Chief and Minister of National Defense. The President of the country was Boleslaw Bierut, one of the outstanding leaders of the Underground Movement. These three persons stood at the head of the newly reborn State and began to organize the whole nation to rebuild the thousands of Polish cities and villages from which the Germans were driven by the Red Army and the Polish forces.

In the meantime, at the beginning of February, 1945, in the

city of Yalta in the Russian Crimea, the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill from Great Britain, and Premier Joseph Stalin of Soviet Russia met for discussion on further developments of the war and to settle post-war world politics. A certain part of the joint declaration of February 11, made by these representatives of the nations, called by the newspapers "The Big Three," concerned Poland. The following is a part of the official text released in Washington by the White House:

"A new situation has been created in Poland as a result of her complete liberation by the Red Army. This calls for the establishment of a Polish Provisional Government which can be more broadly based than was possible before the recent liberation of western Poland. The Provisional Government which is now functioning in Poland should therefore be reorganized on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from Poles abroad. This new government should then be called the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity.

"M. Molotoff, Mr. Harriman, and Sir A. Clark Kerr are authorized as a commission to consult in the first instance in Moscow with members of the present Provisional Government and with other Polish democratic leaders from within Poland and from abroad, with a view to the reorganization of the present Government along the above lines. This Polish Provisional Government of National Unity shall be pledged to the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot. In these elections all democratic and anti-Nazi parties shall have the right to take part and to put forward candidates.

"When a Polish Provisional Government of National Unity has been properly formed in conformity with the above, the Government of the U. S. S. R., which now maintains diplomatic relations with the present Provisional Government of

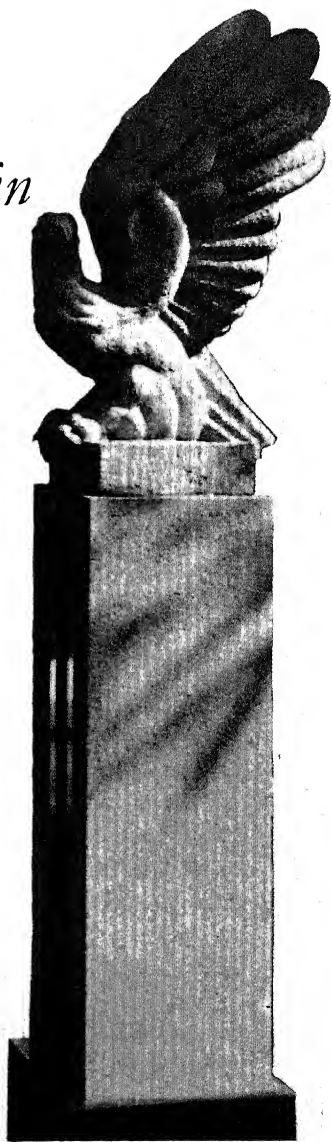
Poland, and the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the United States of America will establish diplomatic relations with the new Polish Provisional Government of National Unity and will exchange Ambassadors, by whose reports the respective Governments will be kept informed about the situation in Poland.

“The three heads of Government consider that the eastern frontier of Poland should follow the Curzon Line, with digressions from it in some regions of five to eight kilometers in favor of Poland. They recognize that Poland must receive substantial accessions of territory in the north and west. They feel that the opinion of the new Polish Provisional Government of National Unity should be sought in due course on the extent of these accessions and that the final delimitation of the western frontier of Poland should thereafter await the peace conference.”

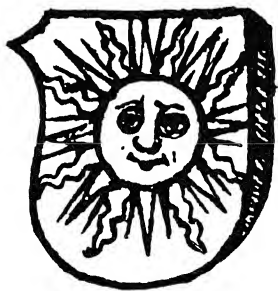
* * * * *

THE PIASTS

Come Home Again



*HERE WE SEE the Piast family
returning from the Soviet Union as
Poland is freed, and preparing to build
a new life. From all parts of the world
come refugees; and the future of the
country begins to take shape.*



CHAPTER 23

The Return

THE TOWN OF JULFA was situated in a mountainous and picturesque region on the border between the Soviet Union and Persia. The river Aras, flowing into the Caspian Sea, separated the two countries; on the high right side was the kingdom of Persia, known today as Iran, and on the left to the north the Soviet land began. Stefan Piast, his wife, two daughters and two sons came to this sunny town of Julfa directly from the Altai territory in Southern Siberia. From here the five of them were to go to Africa, because Piotr wanted to enlist in the Polish army fighting side by side with the Allies on the western front.

Because their clothing was worn and ragged, the Red Cross provided them with new clothes donated by the people of the United States. Fed and equipped by the American relief organization, the family made preparations to continue their journey. But one evening in the barracks Maria remarked to her husband and children, "I cannot understand why we have to gallivant around the world? Warszawa has been liberated by the Red Army and the Polish regiments." She paused for a moment, thoughtfully, and when no one made any reply, she continued further, "The Germans have been practically cleaned out of all Poland."

Again a long silence prevailed. All of them yearned to return to their native land, but they were here on the Iranian border.

They had moved here at the instigation of the unreliable Polish agitators, who promised them hills of gold in Africa and maybe a kingdom on the river Congo or the river Kasai.

The words Maria Piast spoke in this moment of uncertainty awakened them as if the water of the river Aras had been suddenly dashed in their faces. Ewa pushed her long, blond hair away from her face.

"Naturally, it is better to return home and suffer and toil in our own land than somewhere in an African jungle," she said. "Instead of laboring for some African planter, we can help rebuild Poland. Certainly she needs the willing hands of all her citizens."

Piotr was the only one who was opposed to this. He had only one thought—to join the Polish regiments in France. Ewa was very angry at him and she burst out, "You want us to go to Africa, so that in the middle of the journey somewhere in the Mediterranean Sea you can leave us and head for France. You think only of yourself. We have to go to the African jungles while you go to a civilized country. What a son and brother you are!"

"Oh, be quiet!" exclaimed Piotr in annoyance. Then he added more calmly, as he considered the difference in the objects of their journeys. "It is only because I am willing to enter the Polish army that you are being taken to a safe place in Africa."

"Is there such a place?" his mother inquired. She had always imagined that everyone who lived in that part of the world continually fried in the sun that beat down all day long. Mr. Piast made no sound, as he sat there pondering the matter. He knew this argument would settle nothing and would probably end in an angry quarrel, so he remarked in a tired voice, "Children, go to bed. I will think over all this and tomorrow morning we will continue this talk about Poland, Africa, and the army."



*Poland as it may appear after the
settlement of the Peace Conference.*

POST WAR POLAND

Showing Possible
Territorial Changes

And this concluded the discussion. Each of the troubled, uncertain family had a very thoughtful expression on his face. They all threw themselves down on their straw mattresses spread out on the floor. Before long sleep enfolded them in its dark wings, and they dreamed of their far-away native land with fields bright with poppies, bluebottles, and thyme. Their peasant spirits longed for the fragrant Polish fields, while their hearts, frightened by propaganda, trembled for the future of their country, which the Polish agitators even in Southern Siberia had said would be filled with "red terror." The mother and children thought that the new rulers in Poland would punish them for leaving their country instead of staying to help fight; even Stefan Piast believed this too at times. At the beginning he fought off these thoughts by various arguments and conceptions. He reasoned with himself; actually he had always been opposed to the Nazi idea and had always supported fairness and justice, and besides he had never belonged to the ruling class. In the end he lost all orientation, and for the first time in his life he lost his head and all faith in his own arguments. The outcome had been this sudden departure of the family to the Soviet-Iranian border. Besides, his own son Piotr believed all the propaganda he heard and read and was determined to join the National army in France.

But this last quarrelsome evening brought Stefan Piast to a clearer decision. He did not sleep the whole night long, but went over and over all the uncertainty and doubts that were confronting him. And when the red sun rose over the picturesque Iranian mountains, Stefan had reached a final decision which he determined to announce the first thing in the morning.

Before breakfast he called his family together and spoke to them in a resolute voice. "I have always been and I still am responsible for the future of your lives. I am the father of this family, am I not?"

From the sound of their father's voice they each thought it best not to answer. Only Mietek muttered something under his breath. They waited impatiently for the decision which they knew would follow.

"We are immediately returning to Poland!" Stefan Piast cried out with assurance. The tone of his voice was enough for the whole family. They knew there was no disagreeing with his decision. After a few matters were cleared up, the six Polish refugees made preparations immediately after breakfast to return to their recently liberated country.

The journey led through the Caucasian mountains and then on a freight train to the Soviet Ukraine. They stopped for a long rest in the ruined Ukrainian city of Kharkov, where the representatives of the Polish embassy in Moscow supplied them with money and provisions. In another Ukrainian city, Kiev, they were informed that their old province, Wolyn, now belonged to the Soviet Ukraine. They had a choice of either returning to their village of Adamowka in Wolyn and becoming citizens of the Soviet Union or going to Poland proper, where they would be given a piece of land. They chose the latter at the urging of their hearts and because their minds told them that their land in Adamowka was burned and completely ruined, anyway. One way or the other, they would have to start anew, but they preferred to be among their own people on Polish soil.

After a long, tiresome trip, the Piasts found themselves in the village of Silno, not far from the historic Polish city of Lublin. They could sense the coming of spring to the countryside as the sweet aroma of budding grass filled the air and the buds on the pussywillows opened. The birch and the cherry trees by the roadside would bloom any day now because their branches were full and sticky with running sap. The snow on the ground was being slowly swallowed up by the earth and the soil smelled of the greening blades of early wheat and

WITH the liberation of
their homeland thousands of
refugees returned to Poland
from the Middle East, Africa and western Europe.
This group is pictured in Iraq.



rye. The village of Silno was not much damaged. Most of the signs of war appeared on the exhausted faces of the peasants and in their ragged clothing. As they gazed on the fields, their bent bodies seemed to cry out, "Please, God, let this wheat and rye grow and ripen fast before we die of starvation."

The village children, running barefooted on the damp cold earth, wearing only shirts or botched suits made out of canvas bags, yelled and laughed at nothing, like all the other children in the world. Perhaps in this way they greeted spring, which would be their salvation. In some barns could be heard the lowing of cattle which the Germans in their hurried escape to the west had not had time to take with them.

The village of Silno stood on a small hill overlooking the flat fields where the reflection of the pale spring sun shone in the puddles of water. It seemed very little different from Adamowka, the birthplace of the Piasts. The newcomers liked Silno, and its inhabitants took the Piasts sincerely into their midst, asking them questions until they were worn out. They had to tell and retell their experiences on the long journeys they had made in wagons, on trains, and often on foot. The stories had no end because both sides wanted to know everything that had happened during the long, hard years of war.

Adam Zaranski, who lived on the outskirts of the village near a small forest, offered one large room in his cottage to the Piasts as a temporary lodging. Zaranski lived alone now because, while he had been away serving in a partisan brigade, the Nazis had taken his wife and seven children and put them in the Majdanek concentration camp near Lublin. He had never received any news from them, and when the country was liberated from the Germans he had gone to Majdanek, but he had found no trace of his family. So when he saw the Piast children he took them to his home and fed them potatoes and buttermilk, which was all he had to offer. From that day on, the Piasts stayed with Zaranski, who tried in every way to

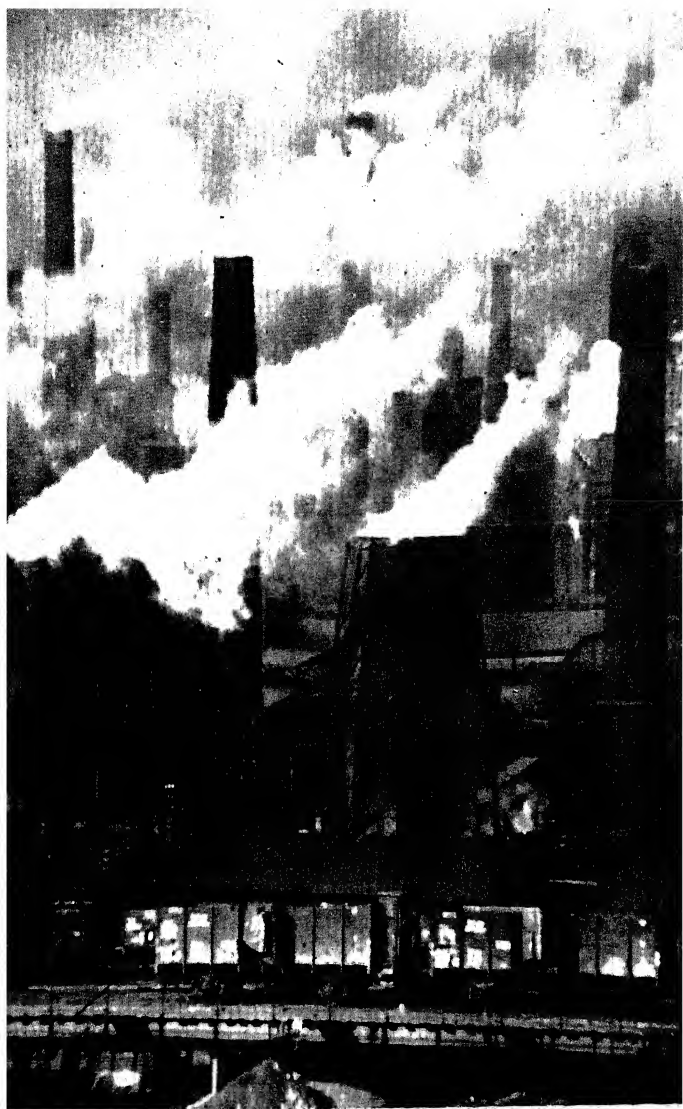
be of help to them. He gave them the largest of his three rooms. It was clean and neat and gayly decorated. At either end of the room stood a large bed, covered with a white crocheted bedspread, and each bed had four large pillows covered with embroidered white linen pillowcases. Between the beds stood a large oak wardrobe which had flowered designs of poppies, roses, and bluebottles on the doors. On each side of this closet were two handmade chairs, and along the opposite wall stood a long decorative bench. Near the bed on the right were a little cradle and a doll, waiting for the return of the little mistress. On the walls between the beds were many holy pictures, and a crucifix hung over a small table on which was a small lighted kerosene lamp. From the oak ceiling colored paper cutouts hung down. These cutouts, called *wycinanki*, were very decoratively arranged, and from a distance looked like a chandelier in a magnificent mansion. Zaranski's wife and children must have spent many hours with their scissors and paper brought from Lublin. These paper decorations, found in most of the peasant homes in Poland, were known over one hundred years ago. Each year that passed the peasants improved the designs and blended the colors together more expertly, so that in time the cutouts had become the main and most prominent decorations in a village home.

So it was not strange to hear Mr. Zaranski proudly boast to his guests when he gave them the room, "This is just the way my wife left it. All I have done is to wipe the dust from the furniture. The *wycinanki* on the walls and those hanging in the center were made by my wife and my two oldest daughters. They were known all over the county for making the most beautiful bouquets of flowers and wreaths from the simplest pieces of paper."

"They are beautiful!" Mrs. Piast exclaimed, as she gazed at the intricate designs and the harmonious colors of the *wycinanki*. Her husband turned to his children and said, "Look,



Peasants have returned to reoccupy or rebuild their homes.



Smoke is coming once more from the factory chimneys of the cities.

and learn how to make them. If you make them half as well that will be enough."

Ewa laughed and the mischievous Mietek said, "Ewa wants to attend a university and doesn't want to be bothered with scissors and paper."

"But it will not hurt to learn this, too," their mother interrupted, not wanting to injure the feelings of good Mr. Zaranski or change his opinion about the ability of his deceased wife and daughters. He looked at the Piasts thoughtfully and remarked, "Right now our country needs intelligent people with university educations and not *wycinanki*. The Nazis tried to destroy the peasants, but they could not exterminate us entirely because there are too many of us. But people of learning, and especially those who opposed the Nazis' injustices, were completely destroyed."

There was much truth in what this scarred-faced peasant said. This was not the time for paper cutouts. The whole country needed bread, clothing, new schools, and homes. Practically every city, village, and town had to be rebuilt after the ruin and havoc of war. So the Piast family and millions of their compatriots rolled up their sleeves and earnestly went to work. Ewa went to Lublin and attended a free university and began the study of her beloved chemistry. Piotr enlisted in the army, which in a short time was raised to a million soldiers. The two youngest children, Jadwiga and Mietek, attended public school in their new village of Silno, where there were many pleasant barefooted children of their own age. Stefan Piast and his wife were busy building their home on a piece of land given to them by the government. A nobleman's large estate had been divided among the peasants. Their new home was situated about a half mile beyond the village of Silno. A new, youthful energy seemed to well up in Stefan and his wife, driving them day and night. They hauled logs, planed the wood, and set the framework of their house in thick pine

boards. Maria Piast planted a small vegetable garden. Everything grew like yeast in the soft spring earth. Sometimes rain would fall, and then the warm sun would break through again as if it knew that the people were poor and hungry.

Their home grew, too, because Adam Zaranski helped them, and so did many other villagers in Silno. Building went fast for Piast and his neighbors, spread like ants over the old estate of Count Kretynski. A new village was growing, more beautiful and happier than before the war.

New cities and villages were being built in the length and breadth of the whole country. The sound of axes and hammers, the whirl of saws and files were heard throughout the land. The factory machines kept busy, and the village ploughs seemed never to rest. Every day there were more homes, factories, streets, and parks. A new Poland was arising on the ashes of the old. And what the future held for this Poland would depend on the success of the plan for peace worked out by the United Nations.

In accord with the Yalta agreement, on Friday, June 22, 1945, came the news from Warszawa that a new Government of National Unity had been formed on a basis of understanding between the representatives of the Polish Provisional Government, political parties in Poland, and the Polish groups in London.

Edward B. Osobka-Morawski, head of the Provisional Government, became Prime Minister with first Vice-Prime Minister W. Gomolka and second Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, former Prime Minister of the London Government. Boleslaw Bierut became the President and head of National Council composed of seven outstanding Poles from at home and abroad. The government thus included members of all democratic parties.

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